

Vol. LV.

No. 218.

BELGRAVIA

LONDON MAGAZINE

DECEMBER

1884

CHATTO & WINDUS. PICCADILLY. LONDON. W.

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Mechanical Chess-Players.

BY RICHARD A. PROCTOR.

It is a singular and not altogether pleasing circumstance, that whereas the advent of De Kempelen's so-called automaton chess-player was hailed in almost every European capital with unbounded plaudits, the far more ingenious and, to speak the truth, the far more honest mechanical chess-player which has been recently exhibited at the Aquarium, and is now playing excellent chess at No. 9 Strand, has received far less attention than it deserves. It would seem, indeed, from the praises accorded to Mephisto, as well as the criticisms passed upon his supposed deficiencies, that the true character of this mechanical chess-player has not been rightly apprehended by most of those who have expressed their opinions respecting his performances. It is especially to be noted that in two important respects Mephisto has the advantage of De Kempelen's chess-player. In the first place, Mephisto really is what the gentleman who has 'raised' him (the expression may be understood at the reader's pleasure) asserts him to be, De Kempelen's chess-player most assuredly was not; and secondly, there was a concealed player in the supposed automatic structure (including figure, seat, table, and chest) which De Kempelen exhibited, whereas it is certain that there is no such player in either the figure, the seat, the table, or the chess-board (there is no chest) constituting the *tout-ensemble* of the display in the case of M. Gumpel's Mephisto. Add to this that in a mechanical sense the movements of Mephisto are simply perfect, while his play is of a very high class indeed, and it will be judged that he fairly deserves something like the enthusiastic recognition which was undeservedly accorded to De Kempelen's so-called automaton.

The history of De Kempelen's figure is so curious, and illustrates so well the points to which I now chiefly desire to draw attention, that it will be well to give a brief sketch of it in this place, the more so that, as I believe, few of the present generation have read the accounts which, half a century or so ago, were given in several publications, respecting that clever deception.

In the year 1769, De Kempelen, a Hungarian gentleman then well known for his skill and ingenuity in mechanical matters, was invited by the Empress Maria Theresa to witness some magnetic experiments exhibited at the Imperial Court by M. Pelletier, a

Frenchman. During the exhibition he casually mentioned that he thought he could exhibit far greater wonders than Pelletier had displayed. The Empress, a rather cleverer woman than most of her class, obtained a promise from De Kempelen that he would give an early proof that his boast was not an idle one. He kept his word with her, appearing at Vienna in the next year with his Automaton chess-player. De Windisch, one of those who saw the figure as thus first exhibited,—for afterwards it was in some noteworthy respects altered,—gives the following account of it :—¹

‘ I saw the inventor draw from a recess his automaton, fixed to a good-sized chest, and I could not, any more than others, help suspecting that this chest might contain a child, which, as I guessed from the dimensions of the case, might be ten or twelve years of age. But we were all confounded on seeing De Kempelen turn up the garments of the automaton, pull forth the drawer, and open all the doors of the chest. Moving it about, thus opened by means of the castors on which it is placed, he turned it in all directions, and permitted us freely to examine it all over.’

Here follows a long account of his own and the spectators’ bewilderment, which might all, save one episode, be included in the simple statement that they were thoroughly mystified. The exception is the case of one old lady, who ‘ crossed herself with a devout sigh,’ and then ‘ hid herself in a distant window, that she might no longer remain in a proximity so dangerous as that existing between herself and the demon she now fully believed must occupy the automaton.’

The chest to which the figure was affixed is $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 2 feet wide, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high; and was, by means of castors, moved easily from place to place. Behind it was a figure the size of life, dressed in Turkish costume, seated upon a wooden chair, fastened to the body of the automaton.

The figure ‘ leans its right arm on the table, holding a long Turkish pipe in the left hand in the attitude of a person who ceases to smoke. It plays with its left hand,—an oversight not discovered till the work was too far advanced for a change to be made. When the Turk is about to play, M. De Kempelen takes the pipe from its hand. Before the automaton is a chess-board, screwed to the table, or upper surface of the chest, on which the eyes of the figure appear to be constantly fixed. M. De Kempelen opens the first door of the chest, and pulls out the drawer which is underneath. The chest is partitioned off into two equal parts, of

¹ I have considerably abridged his very wordy account, which in full would occupy seven or eight pages of this magazine, and yet convey no more real information than the above abridgment.

which the left is narrower than the right. The left side, indeed, occupies scarcely one half of the length of the chest, and is filled with wheels, levers, cylinders, and other pieces of clockwork. In the division to the right are seen some wheels, some spring barrels, and a couple of horizontal quadrants. The remainder is filled with a carpet, a cushion, and a small board, on which are traced certain letters in gold. At a subsequent point of time, and prior to the automaton's commencing play, the inventor takes out this casket, and places it on a side table. He does the same by the board of letters, which is finally placed on the chess-board after the game is played, to enable the automaton by these means to answer questions to be put to him.' In the drawer of the chest are chess-men, and also a small box containing six small chess-boards presenting an ending of a game. These positions could be set up on the figure's own board, and he undertook (or M. De Kempelen undertook for him) to win each and every such game by force, whether playing with the red or white,—a poor device, seeing that hundreds of such positions have been devised which an average player could retain in his memory, winning mechanically whether he took one side or the other.

Now follows an important part of Windisch's description,—important, at least, as showing how thoroughly he and others were deceived by De Kempelen's ingenious devices. 'M. De Kempelen,' he says, 'not only opens the front door of the chest, but also those behind; by which means all the wheels are clearly seen, so as to give the most perfect conviction that no living being could be hidden therein. To render this *exposé* more complete' (as Windisch supposed, but in reality for a quite different purpose) the constructor places a lighted paper in the interior of the chest, thus throwing light into its remotest corners. Finally he lifts the robe of the automaton, and throws it over his (the figure's) head, in such a manner as completely to shew the structure of the interior, where also are seen only wheels and levers, which so entirely occupy the body of the automaton that room is not left to hide even a cat. The very trousers of the Turk are furnished with a small door, likewise flung open, to remove the slightest shadow of a doubt. But do not imagine, good reader, that the inventor shuts one door as he opens another. *The entire automaton is seen at the same time uncovered, the garments being also turned up, and the draw opened as well as all the drawers of the chest.* In fact, it is in this state he rolls it from place to place around the room, courting the inspection of the curious.'

All this, in reality, was done to throw dust in the eyes of the 'curious'; for, as will presently be explained, the interior was not

all shown at once, as it seemed to be. To proceed, however, with Windisch's description: M. De Kempelen then 'shuts all the doors of the chest, and places it behind a balustrade, made to prevent spectators from shaking the machine, and also to keep clear for the inventor a rather spacious place, in which he occasionally walks, approaching the chest at times on the right or left side, but without touching it until it is time to wind up the springs.' . . . M. De Kempelen places the casket on a little table near the machine; and the inventor 'has frequent recourse to the casket' during the play, looking at the inside which is kept hidden from the spectators. 'It is generally assumed,' says Windisch with charming *naïveté*, 'that the casket is simply a device to attract attention; still, M. de Kempelen assures his visitors that without it the automaton could not play.'

The automaton when about to move 'slowly raises his arm and directs it towards the piece he intends to play. He suspends his hand over the piece, spreads his fingers to grasp it, places it in its destined situation, draws back his arm and again rests it on the cushion.' . . . At each move he makes, a slow sound of wheels and clock-work is heard. The noise ceases when the move is made. The automaton always claims the first move. When his adversary plays, the figure lifts his head and overlooks the board. He courteously warns the queen of being attacked by bowing his head twice; and equally notifies such to the king by three bows. Should a false move be played, he indignantly shakes his head; but not confining himself to tacit disapprobation, he instantly confiscates the offending piece, following up the capture by playing himself—thus depriving his opponent not only of his piece, but of his move also. This *divertissement* happens not unfrequently; spectators wishing to test the figure's powers of discrimination. Of course the figure here departed from the laws of chess, which inflict no severer punishment on a false move than that the opponent may either let the move stand, insist on the piece falsely moved making a correct move, or else that the player who has moved a piece falsely, shall replace it and move his king.

'To destroy the impression that magnetism is the principle of action, M. De Kempelen permits the most powerful magnet to be placed on the machine.'

The figure played good chess. The account shows clearly that it was not in communication with either of the adjoining rooms, the ceiling, or the floor; all parts of the interior of the machine seemed to have been so thoroughly shown, at one and the same moment, to the spectators, that no human figure could possibly have been concealed therein. Thus the opinion was adopted

oy not a few that the figure really was what it purported to be, a true automaton, that is, 'a machine made by human hands, performing all its movements by the action of various springs, wheels, and other mechanical forms of power, and by these only.' In other words, it was assumed by those who adopted this opinion, that De Kempelen had so arranged matters that for every possible position which the chessmen might assume upon the board, the internal machinery would so act as to cause the figure to make—I will not say the best possible move for that position, seeing that in that case it could never have been beaten—but a good move. In my paper on 'Automatic Chess and Card Playing' ('Science Byways,') I have shown that, while it is theoretically possible to construct such an automaton, it is practically impossible to do so,—and would be, even if the whole human race could for thousands of years devote their energies to that one purpose. The same point has been put very clearly in a somewhat different manner by the constructor of Mephisto,—who (M. Gumpel, not Mephisto) describes the figure, be it remembered, not as an automaton, but simply as a mechanical chess-player. 'The chessmen,' he says, 'though thirty-two in number, may for simplicity's sake be reduced to twelve, (viz. King, Queen, Rook, Knight, Bishop, and one pawn of each colour, leaving the other pawns out of the question), while one of these 12 pieces stands on No. 1 square, either one of the other eleven may stand on No. 2 square, so that we can make 11 changes on No. 2 square, for each piece placed on No. 1; or for easier calculation let it be 10 changes; hence on the two squares we can ring 10×10 or 100 changes. We have on the chess-board 64 squares; since, however, the kings can never stand on adjacent squares, and as a king cannot be in check by more than one piece at a time, &c. &c.' (these &c.'s refer to the limitations on the possible positions of pawns), 'we shall have to reduce the number of squares to, be it, one half, 32.' (This is a very generous reduction, be it noticed, the limitations being in reality few compared with the total number of positions possible.) 'To obtain the number of combinations which can be formed by the chessmen on these 32 squares, we have to multiply the number 10 by itself 31 times, and the result would be given by writing 32 noughts after 1 (100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000). Similar combinations may happen at different times in different parts of the board; still, provision must be made for the arm to make the required moves on either part; the same combination of pieces on the board, shifted only one square, requires in the special mechanism a special arrangement for such altered position; so that the above

number of possible combinations for which the mechanism must be constructed is certainly not too high. The assumption that the number of openings is limited, and that the machinery can be set for the best moves, is very easily upset by a tyro putting his queen *en prise*, to say nothing of a false move; and unless an automaton could take advantage of the first and correct the latter, the game would soon arrive at a chaotic state.'

When these results, which, be it remembered, fall short of the truth, are taken into account, we can readily calculate the time and labour required for constructing such an automaton. The mechanism, as M. Gumpel says, 'may be compared with a jacquard loom, in the cards of which (in this instance of metal) one hole is to be marked and drilled, for each possible position of the men on the board. Let a workman mark and drill 1,200 holes per hour—12,000 per day of 10 hours; let him work 300 days in the year, and 50 years of his life, drilling 180, or in round numbers 200 millions of holes during this period, then we should have to write 23 noughts after 5 (500,000,000,000,000,000,000) to obtain the number of workmen, whose lives' labour would be absorbed in marking and drilling the number of holes required to meet the above combinations.' Or we may put the matter in this way. At any given moment there are not above 1,500 millions of human beings in the world, say 250 millions of persons capable of carrying on the work of drilling holes in the manner required. Then adopting M. Gumpel's numbers, which are very moderate, it will be found that all such persons living on the globe at any one time, would have to be at work during 100,000,000,000,000 years to drill the necessary number of holes in the metal plates. But as the plates would have in the first instance to be made, and as they would have to be all properly adjusted and placed in connection with the automaton figure and his chess-board—they would, by the way, at a very moderate computation, require a space about a million times larger than the whole of the space within the glass walls of the Crystal Palace—it will, I think, become tolerably clear that no truly automaton chess-player will ever be constructed. It will at least be admitted, I conceive, that De Kempelen, during the year which elapsed between his promise to Maria Theresa, and the exhibition of his so-called automaton, had not accomplished precisely all that was requisite to make a true automaton player.

Under all the circumstances, and especially when we remember that he did not contradict statements implying that his chess-player was truly automatic, we may as well give De Kempelen all the credit which he deserves for refusing the offer of large sums of

money from persons who wished to purchase the automaton for speculative purposes. ‘For a long time,’ says Mr. Walker, ‘his nice sense of honour’ (about which there may be some slight question, perhaps) ‘prevented him from stooping to coin cash from metal so intrinsically base as he felt the ore in question really to be.’ Which is very much as though one should say that a man was too honourable to accept a post of trust for which he felt himself utterly unworthy because intrinsically dishonest. However, be this as it may, De Kempelen took his automaton to pieces, stowed it away, and gave out (untruly, but that is a detail) that it had been hopelessly damaged by repeated removals.

Time passed, and the automaton was almost forgotten, when the Grand Duke Paul of Russia paid a visit with his wife to the Emperor Joseph II. of Austria. After the first round of entertainments had passed, and when something still seemed necessary to the amusement of his guest, Joseph bethought himself of De Kempelen’s automaton. He sent to the mechanician, asking him to put the figure into working order. In five weeks’ time the obsequious De Kempelen, always ready to oblige great folks, had furbished up his automaton. ‘As before, its success was complete; the Grand Duke and his spouse, as well as the Emperor Joseph, were equally delighted and astonished by its feats.’ De Kempelen was handsomely rewarded, and being urged to reconsider his determination not to make money out of his cleverly deceptive figure, he condescended to put aside what our biographer calls his false delicacy, and prepared to lie abroad for the good of his pocket.

In 1783 De Kempelen went to Paris, where, however, the automaton was most wofully beaten by the French chess-players at the Café de la Régence. ‘It is worthy of mention,’ says Walker, ‘that De Kempelen himself was very inferior to his automaton as a chess-man’ (meaning presumably as a chess-player), ‘since in playing in the ordinary manner a first-rate practitioner could give him the rook; but there was much less difference between the best flesh-and-blood players and their wooden opponent.’

De Kempelen, well satisfied with the success of his speculation in Paris, proceeded next across the straits with his automaton. At that time Philidor, the renowned French player, had been for some time resident in London. He does not appear to have played himself with the automaton. But he had formed a school of chess here ‘of greater extent,’ Mr. Walker states, ‘than was ever seen before or after. To this cause may be attributed,’ Mr. Walker proceeds, ‘the high fee of admission to a sight of our automaton, fixed by M. de Kempelen at five shillings! Hundreds and thou-

sands of persons flocked to the show.' An improvement had been made, by the way, in the mechanical part of the figure, which now actually pronounced the word *check* or *échec*, or something like one or other sound, according perhaps to the fancy of the auditor.

A Mr. Thicknesse, however, denounced the whole affair. He seems to have had rather a fancy for such denunciations. 'Forty years since,' he wrote in 1785, 'I found three hundred people assembled to see, at a shilling each, a coach go without horses, moved by a man within side of a wheel, ten feet in diameter, just as the crane wheel raises goods from ships on a quay. Mr. Quin, the Duke of Athol, and many persons present, were angry with me for saying it was trod round by a man within the hoop or hinder wheel, but a small paper of snuff put into the wheel soon convinced all round that it could not only move, but sneeze too, like a Christian.' M. De Kempelen would probably have objected to the introduction of an ounce or two of snuff into the machinery of his automaton, though, as we shall see presently, a device somewhat like Thicknesse's was afterwards applied successfully to the chess-player. Mr. Thicknesse showed that a man might be concealed within the chest or the figure. 'I saw,' he says, 'the ermine trimmings of the Turk's outer garment move once or twice, when the figure should have been quite motionless, and that a confederate is concealed is past all doubt; for they only exhibit the automaton from one to two o'clock, because the invisible player could not bear a longer confinement, for if he could, it cannot be supposed that they would refuse to receive crowns for admittance from 12 o'clock to 4 instead of from 1 to 2.' Mephisto, by the way, is prepared to meet all comers from 2 to 10. I have been present for the whole interval, and during the whole time he was not for five minutes together without an antagonist. If I remember rightly, he played on that occasion thirty-two games, winning all save one (which I won myself, but only through an oversight on Mephisto's part, and it was but one out of eight I played that day) and drawing two others. On the same day he played with one of our strongest amateurs a most interesting game, since I believe published, in which one of the most beautiful combinations I have ever seen (in quick play) was rapidly wrought out.¹

Mr. Thicknesse was doubtless near the truth; but as he used

¹ Two circumstances, telling in different directions, must be remembered in considering Mephisto's play. The first is, that the concealed player is considerably handicapped by the conditions under which he plays, even at the beginning of his long day's spell of play; the second is, that players who meet him are expected to move without any prolonged study of the position, and they are naturally less prepared to play what has been called a 'skittling game,' than he (*i.e.* the concealed player), with his long practice, has necessarily become.

denunciation rather than argument, he received very little attention.

Now occurred a singular episode in the career of the automaton. Hitherto the secret of the figure had lain between De Kempelen and those whom he employed to work the mechanism. But De Kempelen was at this time persuaded to reveal the secrets of the prison-house to about the last man in all Europe whom, had he been wise, he should have selected for a confidant—Frederick (called the Great) of Prussia. Frederick was a lover of chess, but, like Napoleon (who also subsequently met and was beaten by the automaton), he was by no means a strong player. Defeated by the figure, he became the more eager to know how the deception was managed. For a large sum De Kempelen agreed to solve the riddle. Frederick was thoroughly mortified by the disclosure. He did not reveal the secret; but he did worse, he showed and expressed such utter contempt, that the automaton no longer attracted attention. It was thrown aside into an obscure lumber-room, where it remained till a new generation was ready to be duped afresh by it.

Cast aside because of the contempt of one fighting prince, the automaton was recalled to notice by another. When Napoleon came to Berlin, the figure was furbished up again for his entertainment. He played against it in person. ‘The contest,’ says Walker, ‘was marked by an interesting circumstance. Half-a-dozen moves had barely been played, when Bonaparte, purposely to test the powers of the machine, committed a false move; the automaton bowed, replaced the offending piece, and motioned to Napoleon that he should move correctly. Highly amused, after a few minutes the French chief again played an illegal move. This time the automaton without hesitation snatched off the piece which had moved falsely, confiscated it, and made his own move. Bonaparte laughed; and for the third time, as if to put the patience of his antagonist to a severe trial, played a false move. The automaton raised his arm, swept the whole of the pieces off the board, and declined continuing the game.’

When Eugène Beauharnais was King of Bavaria, the automaton, then in the possession of M. Maelzel, was exhibited successfully before him. Eugène offered 1,200*l.* for the figure and its key. The offer was accepted; the courtiers were sent from the room; ‘the door was locked by Eugène, and every precaution taken to ensure his acquiring the sole knowledge of the enigma. The prince is alone with the demonstrator; the latter, unhesitatingly and in silence, flings open simultaneously all the doors of the chest, and Prince Eugène saw—what he saw! Blue Beard’s wife at the door

of the azure chamber, looked not more blue than did Bavaria's monarch ; but Eugène faced the *dénouement* with greater wisdom than the former royal purchaser of the secret. He shrugged up his shoulders, took a pinch of snuff, laughed at the joke, and, though he probably thought his purchase *rather dear at the price*, expressed much gratification at inspecting the figure in all its parts. He even subsequently placed himself in the necessary relation with the automaton, and giving it the invisible impulse, conducted it during several games against some of his most intimate friends.'

The automaton quickly passed again into Maelzel's hands. It was exhibited in Paris, M. Boncourt, a very strong player, conducting the figure's chess. In 1819, it was exhibited a second time in London. M. Maelzel engaged the assistance of Mr. Lewis, an excellent chess-player, who conducted the automaton chess for something like a twelvemonth. After this M. Mouret, one of the best French players of the school of Deschapelles, took charge of the figure's play. The automaton (to use the incorrect name by which the figure was at this time constantly designated) now undertook to give the odds of pawn and move to all comers—in other words, his king's bishop's pawn was removed from the board and his opponent took first move. There was as much prudence as caution in this arrangement. Many players who could have conducted a tolerably strong game against Mouret, playing even, would find themselves at a disadvantage in playing the odds-game against him. To him all the resources of this game would be known, to nine-tenths of his opponents the just manner of conducting it would be unknown. Unquestionably with even players the odds of the pawn and move are considerable. But the removal of the king's pawn is not an unalloyed loss to the giver of odds. So soon as he has castled on the king's side, his rook has strong rule over the king's bishop's file, ordinarily impeded (so far as the rook's range is concerned), by his own pawn on that file. Indeed, in the best known of all the gambits, this pawn is sacrificed chiefly with the object of getting command of the file in question. The sacrifice requires a move, which is saved when the pawn is given ; and though some collateral advantages of sacrificing the pawn are not gained when the pawn is given, yet the player who constantly gives the pawn gains much by constant practice in the same line of play, at any rate as against players of less experience in the same game.¹ Mouret hardly lost one game in a hundred at these

¹ A good story was told at Mephisto's table in illustration of the disadvantage of attempting odds against a player familiar with games at odds. Such a player offered an opponent of considerable strength, but of less experience, the odds of the four first moves (to be taken within his own half of the board, as otherwise the familiar

odds. He numbered among his opponents such skilful players as Brand, Cochrane, Keen, and Mercier.

An Oxford graduate at this time, 1819, tried to solve the problem of the automaton's play, but failed to give any satisfactory explanation. Willis, of Cambridge, was more successful. He showed first that certain features in the exhibition clearly indicated that the mechanism supposed to be wound up from time to time had in reality nothing to do with the figure's play. The exhibitor would seem to have been singularly careless in this matter. Although, as Willis truly said, every train of mechanism which has to be wound up, must perform a certain definite amount of work for each turn of the key, the number of turns being also necessarily limited, the key was often turned the same number of times after the figure had played a game of nine or ten moves, as after it had fought out a contest of 70 or 80 moves; nay, sometimes the key was wound through the full number of revolutions when the figure had not even made a single move since the last winding. This clearly showed that, as Mr. Willis expresses it, 'the revolving axis was unconnected with machinery; except, perhaps, a ratchet wheel and click, or some similar apparatus, to enable it to produce the necessary sounds; and consequently that the key, like that of a child's watch, might be turned whenever the purposes of the exhibition seemed to require it.' Then he proved by figures and drawings, that a man might be concealed in the chest, shifting his position several times while the different parts of the apparatus were exposed successively to view. He showed also that when play was in progress, the concealed player might take up such a position as to overlook the board through the stuff waistcoat of the figure. This, as Walker points out, is something like Thicknesse's view; but it was 'now beautifully and exactly made out, even to demonstration, by the aid of a skilful draughtsman and mechanist.' Brewster, in his clever work on natural magic, copied Willis's account. Neither he nor Willis, however, seems, says Walker, 'to have taken into consideration the almost utter impos-

scholar's mate could be given in the four moves). They played two games at these odds. In the first, the taker of the odds played out his king's and queen's pawns two squares each, and his two knights to king's and queen's bishop's third square—having thus at the start a splendid opening. But he lost the game, his opponent's superior experience in odds games enabling him to take advantage of every flaw in the continuation of the attack. In the second game the taker of odds moved out his king's knight as his first move, his queen's knight as his second, then moved back his king's knight as his third move, and his queen's knight as his fourth move, leaving the board as it stood at the beginning, and the first move to his opponent. This game, in which he had no odds, and even the disadvantage (as far as it is such) of the second move, he won. The fact is, he was on familiar ground, whereas in taking the odds he was all at sea.

sibility of the concealed man's being impervious to detection, with merely a veil between him and the public: the least sound or motion would, in such case, destroy the illusion, and his very breathing would infallibly lead to ultimate exposure.' It must not be overlooked, however, that in the Crystal Palace automaton (now at the Aquarium) this is actually the way in which the concealed player was conducting the automaton's chess. It is in reality quite possible so to arrange matters that the concealed player's eyes may be screened from public view while they are directed on the board. Suppose, for instance, that when the doors are closed, a tube is brought into such a position that looking through it one of the player's eyes can see the whole board but no more, then it is certain that no one can see that eye (the other would of course be quite concealed) without placing his head between the chess-board and the concealed tube. It is unlikely that a spectator would ask to be permitted to do this; and if permission were asked, the exhibitor could find many plausible reasons for declining to give it.

And now to give the explanation published in the 'French Penny Magazine,' and afterwards in abstract in the 'Palamède,' after Mouret had sold the secret to the publishers of the former journal.

The man who played was concealed in the chest. 'He sat on a low species of stool, moving on castors, and had every facility afforded him for changing and shifting his position like an eel. While one part of the machine was shown to the public he took refuge in another; now lying down, now kneeling; placing his body in all sorts of positions studied beforehand, and all assumed in regular rotation, like the A, B, C of a catechism. The interior pieces of clockwork—the wheels and make-weight apparatus—were all equally movable; and additional assistance was thus yielded to the fraud. Even the trunk of the automaton was used as a hiding-place, in its turn, for part of the player's body. A very short amount of practice, by way of rehearsal, was found sufficient to meet the purposes of the occasion; and one regular order being observed by the two confederates as to opening the machine, a mistake rarely or never occurred. Should anything go radically wrong, the prisoner had the means of telegraphing his gaoler, and the performance could be suspended.' Those who supposed that they had seen the whole of the interior at one view were simply deceived by devices in which, in reality, consisted the cleverness of the whole affair. 'Certain doors dropped and closed of themselves, with spring locks; others were opened in their places. The machine was turned round, but still was never wholly exposed to view at once. It becomes perfectly ludicrous,' says Mr. Walker, 'to read over again Windisch's glowing description of the miraculous

monster, when we find that even a reference to his own drawings shows that at the time he says all the doors were open, two were closed.'

The lighted candle introduced into the interior when there was nothing to be seen, was purposely left burning close by, in order that no ray of light might flash out from the interior, where a second candle was necessarily burning during the play. For, as has been already stated, the director of the automaton was in the *chest*, not overlooking the board as Thicknesse and Willis supposed.

Now follows a part of the statement which has been called in question by some, to whom Willis's explanation seems more satisfactory. We can understand how a player concealed within the chest could cause the arm of the figure to move in such a way as might be required, or could make the figure nod its head, say 'check,' and so forth; but it is not very easy to understand how any chess-player could conduct a game with reasonable rapidity under the conditions now to be described. We are told that the concealed player had a board with men which he could peg into it, as in the ordinary 'travelling chess-board.' On this board, 'he repeated the move played by the antagonist of the automaton, and on this he concocted his scheme of action, and made his answer, before playing it on the automaton's board through the agency of Mr. Wood's digits.' (This is apparently meant for a joke). 'A third chess-board, blank, with the squares numbered according to the usual mode of chess notation, was fixed, as it were, in the ceiling of the interior; thus forming the reverse of the table on which the automaton really appeared to play. Now, the men with which the automaton conducted his game were all duly magnetised at the foot; and the move being made above, the magnets on the pieces moved, set in motion certain knobs or metallic indices, adapted to each square of the board on the reverse; and thus was the requisite knowledge of the move played communicated to Jack in the Box. . . . The real Simon Pure' (Mr. Walker must jest or die), 'shut up in his cell, saw by the light of his taper the metallic knobs or indices above, vibrating so as to mark the move just played. He repeated this move on his own little board, calculated his answering *coup*, and guided the automaton's figures in order to its being duly performed. The happy association of magnetism with the figure, thus hit upon by De Kempelen, was probably suggested to him by the magnetic experiments of Pelletier at the court of the Empress.'

It has been objected to this explanation (by no less an authority than M. Gumpel, the inventor of the present far more ingenious mechanical chess-player) that in the first place magnetism could hardly do what was (according to this account) required from it,

and that in the second place the process described would take too much time. It must not be forgotten, however, that the explanation came from persons who had seen all the interior of the figure, and had followed all the workings of the mechanism, having paid somewhat heavily for the privilege, and having certainly no interest in giving an untrue account of the matter. Moreover, M. Alexandre, who himself for a time conducted the automaton's play, gave a similar account of the interior arrangements. Professor Tomlinson, who adopts the explanation given in '*Le Palamède*,' had abundant opportunities of ascertaining, in personal intercourse with Alexandre and others who had conducted the automaton's play, the correctness of that explanation. I think, too, that one difficulty mentioned by M. Gümpel indicates rather an omission in the explanation than any real objection. He says that to see the board placed over his head the observer would have to assume a very inconvenient position, one quite incompatible, one would suppose, with the continuance of good chess-play for any length of time. But nothing would have been easier than so to arrange matters that the concealed player could see, side by side with the small board on which he worked, a reflected image of the inverted board with the knobs worked by the magnetic chess-men above. In that case very little practice would be required to move a man on this board almost simultaneously with the indication of the knobs or suspended balls attracted by the magnets; there would thus be practically no loss of time whatever.

Before passing on to consider the far superior claims of Mephisto to public attention, I may quote here two stories from M. de Tournay's amusing article in '*Le Palamède*.' It happened that on one occasion, when the automaton was at Amsterdam, M. Maelzel was more than a year in arrears with M. Mouret's salary. 'The King of Holland sent one morning to engage the exhibition room, at the same time ordering a sum equal to 3,000 francs to be paid to M. Maelzel. The latter went joyfully to announce the good news to his associate; they breakfasted together, and were delighted with the thought of entering the lists with a crowned head. M. Maelzel then hastened to make such preparation as should make the exhibition as brilliant as possible. The performance was to commence at half-past twelve (afternoon). Twelve o'clock arrives, and it is time for M. Mouret to take his station in the chest. But he has not yet arrived, and M. Maelzel hastens to find out the cause of the delay. What is his surprise to find Mouret in bed, and seized with a convulsive trembling. "What do I see? What is the matter?" exclaimed Maelzel. "I have a fever," said his artful assistant. "Why, you were very well

just now!" "Yes, but this is a sudden attack." "The king will be here presently." "He must go back again." "But what can I say to him?" "Tell him the automaton has got the fever." "No more of this folly." "I don't wish to joke with you." "Then get up." "Impossible." "Let me call a physician." "It is of no use." "Is there no means of subduing this fever?" "Yes, one only." "What is it?" "To pay me the 1,500 francs you owe me." "You shall have them—this evening." "No, no; this moment." Maelzel saw too plainly that there was no alternative, and went to fetch the money. The cure was wonderful; the automaton was never so attractive before. The king did not actually play, but he advised his Minister of War, who played for him. The pair were completely beaten by the automaton, but all the blame of the defeat was of course thrown upon the minister.'

The other anecdote relates to one of those foolish practical jokes by which life has very often been endangered, though this case is rather worse than others of the kind because the person who played the joke was personally interested in the result. 'In one of the towns of Germany a conjuror had been exhibiting his various tricks to the delight and amazement of the inhabitants, when the arrival of the automaton presented a still more powerful object of attraction, and left the poor fellow without an audience. Annoyed and jealous at the reputation of his rival, he went to be himself a witness of the new performance, and from his own experience in the art of deception he felt convinced that the chest contained a hidden player. He therefore began all at once to raise a cry of "Fire," in which he was seconded by one or two companions. The spectators were seized with the greatest alarm, in which, strange to say, the automaton participated, and in his flight upset his adversary, and tottered about as if he were mad. Happily, M. Maelzel, who preserved his presence of mind, was able to push him behind a curtain, where he soon became quiet and recovered his usual dignified bearing. The alarm of fire was soon discovered to be false, and the conjuror did not gain anything by his attempt to undeceive the company' (at the risk of their lives, it should be added; one wishes it could have been added that he had gained a sound thrashing). 'After this event, M. Maelzel, in giving directions to a candidate for the office of concealed player, was accustomed to say, "If you hear a cry of fire, don't stir; I will come to your help."

The automaton was afterwards exhibited in the principal towns of the United States and Canada. It was eventually deposited in a lumber-room in Philadelphia, where it remained until some twenty

years ago, when the lumber-room and its contents were destroyed by fire. Of this tragic event, a writer in the 'Chess World,' who was present, gives the following lively account: 'It was in Philadelphia, on the night of July 5, 1854, about half-past ten o'clock. The east roof of the National Theatre was a mass of whirling flames, the front of the Girard House was on fire. A dozen dwellings were blazing fiercely, and the smoke and flames were already curling in eddies about the roof and through the windows of the well-known Chinese Museum. At the east end of this building, nearest to the fire, our friend had dwelt for many years. Struggling through the dense crowd, we entered the lower hall, and, passing to the far end, reached the foot of a small back staircase. The landing above us was concealed by a curtain of thick smoke, now and then alive, as it were, with quick tongues of writhing flame. To ascend was impossible; already the fire was about him. Death found him tranquil. He, who had seen Moscow perish, knew no fear of fire. We listened with painful anxiety. It might have been a sound from the crackling wood-work, or the breaking window-panes, but certain it is that we heard through the struggling flames, and above the din of outside thousands, the last syllables of our departed friend, the sternly whispered oft-repeated syllables, *échec, échec!*'

I have already noticed the first and in reality the most important circumstance in which the exhibition of Mephisto differs from that of M. De Kempelen's figure. Mephisto is described as a mechanical chess-player, not as an automaton. In other words, Mephisto is correctly described, whereas De Kempelen's figure was incorrectly described. We may include with this general description the special remarks about the construction of the objects exhibited. Throughout the interior of the so-called automaton, the spectators were deceived. Everything said and done was intended to carry the false impression that no person was concealed within the figure or the chest. The assistant who exhibits the interior of Mephisto simply shows what he purports to show, that there can be no concealed player in the figure of Mephisto, in the seat, or in the table, and it is certain there is none.

But we may fairly consider Mephisto with special reference to the ingenuity with which the secret of the arrangement by which the figure conducts his game is concealed. The maker distinctly admits that the figure is worked by a concealed player, nay, he is perfectly ready in conversation with friends who may visit Mephisto's room to admit a number of other matters, a knowledge of which should go a long way towards explaining the mystery. Yet he

leaves a most ingenious riddle for them to answer, a very pretty problem for them to solve.

In the first place, we may dismiss the notion that, as in all other cases, a player is concealed within the figure and appurtenances exhibited to the public. The figure of Mephisto is that of a lean man of about the medium height. The head is movable in a number of ways. It nods, turns round, moves backwards, and on close inspection one can see, in some of these movements, where the waxen representation of a head and neck terminates behind the ornamental collar clothing the bust. The bust itself can be examined, prodded with a stick, and generally maltreated (in appearance) as freely and with as little real injury as the Mephistopheles of Goethe received from the sword of Marguerite's enraged brother. The largeness of the seat attracts some attention at first, and undoubtedly if the seat and the lower half of Mephisto's body formed one enclosure, a small human figure could be concealed therein. But the assistant passes a book between the two, even while the play is going on, and while also the upper half of the bust, from which the board could alone be seen by a player concealed in the figure, is open to inspection. The table on which the board is set is shaped precisely like an ordinary club chess-table; the board is also precisely like the ordinary chess-board except that there is a shallow circular depression in the middle of each square, for the men to be set in. The assistant, be it noted, is very careful to set any man straight which has not been properly placed in its circular hollow; but there is good reason for this when we remember that if a man is not set right the top is not central, and the hands of the figure therefore would be apt to strike the head instead of grasping it. This is the more to be considered because the men are not, as has hitherto been the case, of forms specially designed for mechanical play (as all of the same height and so forth) but have the forms of the ordinary Staunton chessmen.

It is next to be noticed that the concealed player does not survey the board set before Mephisto. There are mirrors in the room, and there is nothing in the ordinary arrangements which would forbid the belief that the concealed player sees a reflected image of board and men in an adjacent room: but as games have been played with the figure and board entirely screened under paper covers, this explanation must be summarily dismissed.

The concealed player does not see his adversary, though he can hear him, if he speaks pretty loud and clearly. I infer this partly from what M. Gumpel has mentioned to me (not privately, for he was aware when he spoke that I was so interested in his ingenious work that I might probably write about it), partly from

the behaviour of Mephisto under the control of the concealed player. Thus on the second day of my playing with him, after a most disastrous series of defeats on the first (I was never much of a chess-player, and more than twenty years have passed since I was in practice), I remarked as I sat down that Mephisto would soon dispose of a pair of games with me, saying this for the information of those waiting their turn. On this Mephisto raised his head as if to look at me, and then nodded three or four times as though pleasantly indicating his recognition of my compliment to his skill. I may as well take the opportunity of mentioning here that among nearly a score, I should say, of games which I have played with Mephisto, I have only won one; though it is but fair to myself to say that I have never yet played with him as I should play if I wanted to have a chance of winning. Moreover, it must be remembered that a player who day after day plays continuously for eight hours at what may be called skittling chess, would acquire, even if he had it not at starting, a habitude for rapid play, which would give him an advantage against good players, far more against one who, within the last twenty years, has often passed a year, and has once passed five years, without opening a chess-board. On the other hand, however, it must be remembered that the concealed player has disadvantages to contend against. If a good player set down to a regular match game, steadily played, with Mephisto, I imagine that the concealed player would be handicapped by these disadvantages to the extent of a pawn and move, at least. Such is, I am told, the opinion of the great chess-player Steinitz respecting the player who—to his knowledge—conducts the games of the mechanical chess-player.

In playing against ladies, Mephisto displays a gallantry which could scarcely be expected from a true Mephistopheles, assuming at least that Goethe has correctly caught the character of that prince of darkness. He has not only allowed ladies who are in reality of far inferior force to defeat him, but has even in some cases, I am told, compelled them to do so, by a series of moves bringing on what is called ‘suimate’ (a barbarous hybrid which chess-players ought as quickly as possible to replace by a respectable word). After his defeat by a lady, Mephisto offers his hand to her. When he has defeated or has been defeated by a gentleman, he nods his head pleasantly, unless the game has presented some unusual feature. In the latter case he may be less polite. For instance, a few weeks ago he gave the form of mate known as scholar’s mate¹ to a player who inadvertently left the mate open.

¹ I mean simply that Mephisto’s queen, supported by king’s bishop, took the player’s king’s bishop’s pawn (unmoved) giving mate. I suppose, strictly speaking,

(It was not given, of course, in the usual way which everyone knows ; but still mate came at the sixth or seventh move.) On this Mephisto took his opponent's king from the board and tapped said opponent's nose with the piece, which to say the least did not imply respect for his opponent's powers. Occasionally he makes movements not connected with the game. Thus on one occasion a lady was standing near Mephisto who expressed laughingly some alarm at her proximity to so terrible a being. As if to show that he could be terrible if he wished, Mephisto brought round his arm and seized her dress, at which she shrieked in real terror. Usually, however, Mephisto's movements are all connected more or less closely with the chess play. He surveys the board every now and then, nodding his head thoughtfully as though taking note of the relative powers of the two colours, or considering how such and such lines of play might be pursued. If he makes a very damaging move he looks up at his opponent with a most sardonic smile. If his opponent delays over-long, Mephisto bestows the same look upon him, but with greater persistency. If a game which has lasted some time seems tolerably equal, Mephisto goes through the movement of counting his own men and his opponent's, and then removes his king to the middle of the board. Nor does this always imply, as some seem to imagine, that in reality he has rather the worst of the game. I have seen him win a game, which he had offered in vain to draw.

I have no intention of inquiring closely here into the nature of the arrangements by which Mephisto's play is conducted. Some tolerably safe inferences may, however, be made, and some points noticed which have come under my own observation during the course of several visits which I have paid to Mephisto's reception-room. We know that there is a concealed player ; and as he hears remarks made in a tolerably loud voice, we may infer that he is underneath the floor on which the figure is placed, for that is the only concealed place which is sufficiently near to the players and the bystanders. Since every move made by the player above is communicated at once to the concealed player, we can infer that as a piece is put down some corresponding indication is made on the concealed player's board. It is not yet clear to me whether he knows or does not know when his opponent leaves hold of a man so played. If he does not know, then he is occasionally apt to commit a mistake which in actual play only a tyro would make—moving before his opponent has in reality completed the move. I have seen this happen two or three times ; and in one to give scholar's mate would mean playing the series of moves usually given under that heading in books on chess.

case the sequel was singular and rather significant. The player who was contending with Mephisto claimed his right to move the piece touched wheresoever he pleased (among the moves open to that piece). Accordingly he put back the piece which Mephisto had moved, and completed his own modified move. It so happened that this move was one which could have been made by that piece from the square to which she had been originally moved, but where she had not really been left. Mephisto proceeded to answer the move as if it had been *thus* made ; that is, as though his own piece had been allowed to remain on the square to which he had moved it. He was manifestly unconscious of the fact that his opponent had put this piece back. Finding no resistance to his fingers, he made a signal (striking his fingers against the table) indicative of dissatisfaction or perplexity. His opponent on this resigned the game, rather than enter into an unseemly dispute with his Satanic majesty. It became manifest in this way that the moves of the red men leave no trace on the concealed player's board. The same circumstance was made tolerably clear in the other cases in which Mephisto played before his opponent had, by leaving hold of the moved piece, completed the move. The assistant explained that Mephisto would take no notice of the return of his own piece to the square from which he had moved it. Doubtless we see here the reason why Mephisto plays always with the red men. The white men only communicate (by electrical connection, no doubt) their movements to the concealed player. His own men's movements, being made by himself, need not be communicated to him.

In conclusion, I would note that chess-players who like to play with a strong opponent can combine amusement with chess practice on very moderate terms, in Mephisto's apartment (No. 9 Strand). Instead of charging heavily, as some players of not superior strength are apt to do, he meets all opponents at sixpence a game. The room in which he plays is provided with chess-boards, so that visitors may amuse themselves with play while waiting for their turn with Mephisto, provided they do not prefer to watch his play. Moreover, there is a good chess library, and many of the best periodicals of the day, literary, scientific, and social, are placed on the library table. Mephisto's sanctum, indeed, merits far more numerous visits than it receives.

The Transfused Transformed.

A TALE OF BLOOD.

BY JAMES PAYN.

If you live in Downshire and do not know the ffiendells of ffiendell Court, you are unknown indeed; the circumstance of their name being spelt with two little fs, and pronounced Fendall, stamps it with a peculiar aristocracy. Radicals, indeed—persons who interest themselves in roots—assert that there was at one time no such thing as a capital in our alphabet, and that it was indicated by the duplication of the small letters.. As intelligence increased, capitals were invented, and the last persons to use them were, of course, the most illiterate; so that the retention of the two small fs is not—intellectually speaking—a feather in the ffiendell cap. On the other hand, as a token of antiquity, it is invaluable. The possession of a name that nobody can pronounce without instruction is also obviously a great inheritance, and in this case it was the more valuable, since there is no record of a ffiendell of Downshire having been distinguished in any other way. The family had ‘flourished’ for centuries, in the sense that an old tree is said to flourish, and, like it, most of it was underground.

Sir Geoffrey Fendall (for we will take the liberty of spelling his name as it was pronounced, as though he were an ordinary Christian), the present tenant of the Court, was a widower, childless, and stricken in years. The long line, which had moved as directly as a pawn in chess for so many generations, had at last failed, and the succession was going aslant; nay, even zigzag—like the knight’s move—to a second cousin, young Percival Fendall, of Lincoln’s Inn, barrister-at-law. His father had subsisted on a very moderate property, the income from which had been in no way supplemented by the head of the family, and had bequeathed it in a reduced condition to his son. The former had discovered by bitter experience that the fact of his name being spelt with two fs did not enhance its financial value at the back of a bill; while the latter was seriously thinking of discarding the peculiarity altogether, as an affectation out of which nothing had ever come but ridicule, when suddenly old Geoffrey, acting under advice (not legal, but medical), awoke to the fact of his heir-presumptive’s existence.

He wrote from Downshire with his own hand to invite Percival to Fendall Court.

Most young men would have jumped at such an offer, nor was Percival himself by any means blind to its possible advantages ; but he was a man of that disposition which, in poor people, is called obstinacy, in persons of moderate means, firmness, and in rich people, determination of character. Thanks to nobody but himself, he was surely but slowly making his way in the world, and he was not disposed to barter his independence even for the reversion of the family estate. This was not entailed upon him, but it would have been contrary to all traditions of the house with two fs that Cousin Geoffrey should leave it to any other person than the natural heir. The young man knew, in fact, that unless he gave his kinsman some grave cause of offence, he would one day reign in his stead. Would it not be better, therefore, as he had not an idea in common with the old Squire, that they should keep apart, so that no offence could be given by him ? Percival certainly did not wish to go to Downshire. It was November, and, since he was no sportsman, he greatly preferred London at that season to the country ; just now, indeed, he preferred it at all seasons, from the circumstance that it contained, in Gloucester Place, a young lady called Mary Blake, whose name it was his intention to change to Fendall (with one F) as soon as his income had become sufficient for him to marry upon it.

Her father was a hop merchant, and no doubt given to speculation in his own line, but strongly opposed to contingencies in connection with his daughter's settlement in life. He had at first refused to take Percival's great expectations into consideration at all ; but when this invitation came from the old Baronet he had visibly thawed, and even held out a hope that he might not now insist upon seeing Percival's ledger, setting forth that he had received in fees, &c., at least 500*l.* a year, before he would give consent to his daughter's marriage.

To the young man himself this relaxation of Mr. Blake's proviso gave much less satisfaction than that gentleman had anticipated. In his own mind he was persuaded that the match would be disagreeable to Sir Geoffrey, and render his expectations even less promising than before ; and this was one of the reasons that made him incline to be very dutiful to his venerable cousin at a distance, and through the medium of the post-office. He did not like the old gentleman ; he had resented the coldness he had shown to his father ; and he did not appreciate the overtures now made to himself, which he thoroughly understood were not owing to any personal regard, but only because circumstances had made him the

sole surviving member of the house with two fs. At the same time he was much too sensible to throw away the brilliant prospects which had thus unfolded themselves to his view, if he could retain them with self-respect and without much inconvenience. Although a very unworthy descendant of his race as regarded the belief in their blue blood—which he looked upon either as imaginary, or as a very serious physical ailment—he had inherited a strong indisposition to be bored or troubled. Old Sir Geoffrey himself, with his 20,000*l.* a year and an obedient county, did not dislike being ‘put out’ more than he did, and when he was annoyed he took as little pains as his great kinsman to conceal it. Such men are, socially speaking, the very salt of the earth, who amongst a world of snobs and toadies speak the plain truth to its little tyrants, even if they do not succeed in teaching them how to behave themselves. But Percival had no sense of apostleship whatever. He simply liked his own way as much as his betters did, and—since his ambition was limited—almost as often got it: a man who did not walk, and look, and speak as if the street belonged to him, but rather as if he did not care one halfpenny (which was the case) to whom it did belong. Moreover, his father had been no ‘tenth transmitter of a foolish face,’ and this young fellow was as intelligent as he looked. He knew himself—it is only fools, notwithstanding what philosophers have said to the contrary, who do not—and was well aware that he would not make a favourable impression upon the owner of Fendall Court, and that was another reason why he was unwilling to go there.

That we should be able to keep at a distance the good people from whom we have expectations (and yet retain them) is, however, a mere dream of the optimist; and so Percival found it. To the polite and carefully-worded letter, by which he had endeavoured to evade the invitation to the home of his ancestors, he received a reply by return of post, the tone of which necessitated his immediate appearance at Fendall Court, or his giving up all hopes of ever seeing it his own; in short, Sir Geoffrey was furious.

‘Dear Percival, you had better go,’ pleaded Mary, to whom he had showed the note, with some strong expressions of indignation. She was a beautiful creature, with eyes like a gazelle, and a voice more persuasive to his ear than any in the Law Courts.

‘But he writes so disagreeably,’ said Percival, pulling at his moustache; ‘he must be a most offensive person.’

‘Recollect, my darling, that he is an old man,’ argued Mary, meaning that allowance, as well as reverence, was due to grey hairs.

‘He is not so old as all *that*,’ mused Percival. ‘This sort of

thing may go on—I mean one's having to put up with his impertinent arrogance—for years and years. The question is, is it worth such a tremendous sacrifice?

The wretch was thinking of his own peace of mind, and whether he could keep his temper if such things were said to him—about ‘respect’ and ‘obedience’—as his kinsman had thought proper to put on paper.

‘If you get on with your cousin,’ she murmured, with a beautiful blush, ‘dear papa would, I think, be more inclined to consent—that is—perhaps he would let us marry a little earlier.’

‘You darling! that’s true,’ said Percival, ‘and is worth going through almost anything for. I’ll write and say I will run down to Downshire in the course of next week.’

‘Don’t write, dear—telegraph; and run down by to-night’s train.’

‘But I am to meet you at dinner, Mary, at the Joneses, on Saturday.’

‘Never mind; don’t let me be the cause of your running any risk of increasing Mr. Fendall’s displeasure. I am sure I am giving you good advice. Go to-night.’

‘Very good; I’ll go.’

And Percival went accordingly.

Sir Geoffrey received him with a stately welcome, the coldness of which, however, was owing to the general frigidity of the establishment, rather than to any annoyance at his tardy obedience to his summons. Upon the whole, Percival’s hesitation had perhaps done him good. If he had showed himself eagerly desirous to accede to his kinsman’s wishes, it would probably have been set down by Sir Geoffrey to anything but disinterestedness, and might have even suggested Death—a subject very distasteful to the head of the ffieidells. An independence of spirit which had eventually given way to his wishes was not unpardonable, for it exemplified the power of the will which had subdued it.

The Baronet himself volunteered to be the young man’s guide over the picture gallery and the stables (the horse, we may be sure, was a favoured animal with him), and gave him to understand less by words than by his confidential tone that at some time or another, though at a date so distant that it would be absurd to allude to it, all these things might be his own—if he behaved himself.

It was well understood in Downshire that good behaviour in Sir Geoffrey’s eyes was doing what Sir Geoffrey wished, and for three days Percival’s behaviour was unexceptionable. On the fourth morning, however, it became infamous.

On the previous evening there had been a large dinner party, composed chiefly of the magnates of the county, who had treated the young barrister with a civility that had sufficiently indicated their opinion of his prospects; and the young ladies had been at least as gracious as their fathers and mothers.

'Percival, did you notice that girl in blue, last night?' enquired Sir Geoffrey, snipping off the end of his after-breakfast cigar and proceeding to light it: 'Amelia Elton, Lord Wraxall's daughter; it is my intention that you shall marry her.'

Percival lifted his eyebrows. 'It can't be done, Sir Geoffrey' —here he also lit his cigar with great deliberation—'that is, if I continue to live in England. We should have to go to Salt Lake City, where bigamy is permissible.'

'What the devil do you mean, sir?' exclaimed the Baronet. 'Have you a wife already?'

'No, Sir Geoffrey.' Percival could not help wondering to himself what would have happened had he answered 'Yes.' Would his cousin have had an apoplectic fit (he looked very near it as it was) and gone off the hooks at once, leaving everybody happy ever afterwards? or would he have sent for his lawyer and devised everything he had to the County Lunatic Asylum on the spot? Percival had felt that this crucial matter must crop up sooner or later, and had nerved himself for the encounter. 'I have no wife,' he went on; 'but, what is the same thing, Sir Geoffrey, so far as my future is concerned, I am engaged to be married.'

'What, to that hop-picker's daughter?' thundered the old man, who, it seemed, had been making keener enquiries into Percival's affairs than he had had any idea of.

'Well, sir, her father is a hop-merchant,' returned the young man coolly, 'and I dare say has made some pretty pickings; but I don't think he would like to be called a hop-picker. I may, perhaps, be allowed to add that your use of the term is not very polite to me.'

His face was very white, and looked all the whiter by comparison with his companion's, which was scarlet. They were both in a frightful rage, the one at a white heat, the other boiling.

'And who the deuce are you?' exclaimed Sir Geoffrey, in precisely the same tone (though he was such an aristocrat) as the butcher's boy used who, having run the leg of his wooden tray into the duke's eye, enquired of him: Who the deuce *he* was that he should be so particular about his eyesight?

'My name is Percival Fendall, sir. A man that boasts better blood than you, inasmuch as he can count a generation beyond you.' This reply, intended to be satirical, was an inspiration, and had

quite the contrary effect to what he had expected. He had accidentally protected himself as it were by this interposition of the other's fetish, as though it had been a shield.

'By Jove, that's true,' said Sir Geoffrey, regarding him with undisguised admiration. 'You're the eleventh of us, though not quite in the direct line. I am glad you appreciate the circumstance at its full value. I had been told by a mischievous fellow that you had been thinking of spelling our name with a capital F.'

'That would be blasphemy indeed,' said Percival, without moving a muscle.

'Of course it would,' put in the Baronet eagerly. 'I perceive that my informant was a liar. You are worthy of your name, and you were only joking—though let me observe that I don't like such jokes—when you talked of being engaged to this Miss Lake.'

'Blake, sir, is her name,' continued Percival, with unruffled calm; 'it is a very decent one, though she doesn't spell it with two little bs. She is a delicate-minded, honourable gentlewoman, and I mean to marry her.'

'What, without my consent?'

'No, Sir Geoffrey. I hope, with your consent. You have only to see her, and I venture to think you will confess that Miss —the young lady in blue, whom you were so good as to recommend to me—cannot hold a candle to her.'

'But her blood, sir? You, of all men, should understand the importance, the necessity, the indispensability——' The Baronet supplied in expression and gesture what was wanting to him in words.

'I do, Sir Geoffrey. Science has lately corroborated your opinion upon that point. To persons about to marry it recommends the microscope. Mary's blood shall be subjected to investigation.'

'What nonsense you talk! As if it could possibly be blood like ours! Beware how you trifle—or rather how you venture beyond trifling—with persons of this class. A blot on the 'scutcheon, remember, is ineradicable.'

'If a Fendall were to break his word, Sir Geoffrey, would not that be a blot on the 'scutcheon?'

It was cruel of Percival to place his kinsman on the horns of such a dilemma. But there is no fetish so utterly illogical—and, to say truth, so selfish and egotistical—as that of blood.

'The promise was extracted from you by passion,' answered the old man, 'and is therefore invalid.' Then, as if aware of the monstrosity of this position, he went hurriedly on—as after one has skimmed over thin ice—to paint the horrors of an unequal

marriage. ‘Look at young Lascelles: if he had married as his uncle wished him, he might have stood for the county; a man whose ancestry is only second to our own, but who chose to throw himself away upon a female nobody; respectable, I dare say, she may be—her father lives in Baker Street, and is of the name of Jones. What was the result of it all? Why, young Lascelles was compelled to walk the hospitals.’

If he had been made to walk the plank, it is impossible that Sir Geoffrey could have spoken of the fact with more sincere compassion for the young man’s unhappy fate.

‘I know Lascelles,’ said Percival cheerfully; ‘he lives close to the Blakes.’

‘Very likely,’ put in Sir Geoffrey drily.

‘And has already acquired a good practice,’ continued the young man. ‘He told me he is much happier than when he was subjected to his uncle’s whims and caprices.’

This was a home thrust. Sir Geoffrey seized the bellrope to summon the footman to show his kinsman the door, but, by the time the menial entered, his master’s passion had cooled down. He only said, ‘Make up the fire.’ The fact was that the notion of that extra generation which Percival had boasted of had seized on what the old Baronet ‘called his mind,’ and placed the young man in a position of positive superiority.

‘Look here, Percival,’ he said. ‘Just to oblige you I’ll see this young woman, and if I’m dissatisfied with her you must promise me to break off your engagement.’

‘It is impossible that you should be dissatisfied with her,’ said Percival, gallantly, but evasively.

The old gentleman had got an idea—rather an unusual event with the Fendalls—and hence it was the more to be regretted that it was unworthy of them. If he found this Mary Blake so ‘honourable and delicate-minded’ as Percival had described, he might work upon her feelings by representing that she was ruining the young man’s prospects; if, on the other hand, she was mercenary, he might buy her off.

Accordingly, in due course Sir Geoffrey came up to London, and an interview was arranged between himself and Mary; after which Percival received the following letter:—

My dear Cousin,—Love has not blinded you, for I grant that the young person is very good-looking, but it has dulled your sense of hearing. Miss B. drops her hs—one h I can swear to; it was in ‘hospital.’ This is not her fault, of course, but her misfortune. It is in the blood. If you marry her—being what she is, and can’t help being—you shall never have one acre of the ffriendell land, nor one shilling of the ffriendell money.

Yours faithfully,
G. ff.

The old Baronet would not have dared to write this but that he had, as he flattered himself, won over poor Mary to his side. He had painted to her the splendid prospects that awaited Percival, but which her marriage with him would dissipate for ever; and had appealed to her love itself to discard her lover.

He did not effect what he had hoped, but yet succeeded only too well. The thought that she would be the cause of her Percival's future being destroyed, preyed on her mind and produced a dangerous illness. Percival was heartbroken, and had only just spirit enough left to direct an envelope to Sir Geoffrey, enclosing a piece of his mind. It was an ugly fragment, and thus concluded :—

'If through your infernal egotism my Mary dies, I will take out letters patent and change the idiotic name of ffieandell to Bullock-Smithy.'

Sir Geoffrey was reduced to despair by this frightful menace.

In the meantime poor Mary got weaker and weaker, and had hemorrhage from the lungs, or more probably the heart. The blood of the Blakes, though an inferior fluid, was necessary to her existence, and she was rapidly sinking. Dr. Lascelles, who was called in in consultation, said, 'There is only one thing that can save this young lady's life. We must try transfusion.'

The other doctor—who was of the old school—shook his head as only doctors can.

Dr. Lascelles understood at once, from the great significance of the gesture, that he had never so much as heard of the operation.

'I felt sure you would agree with me,' he said, with the sweet smile that had won his way to professional success—for his practice lay chiefly among the ladies. 'You remember Playfair's directions, without doubt?' And he told him what they were. 'One of us two must sustain this ebbing life.'

'I think it had better be you,' returned the other hastily. 'There's nothing like new blood—I mean young blood.'

'True; I am young and strong: I can't see a beautiful creature like this slipping through our hands.' And he bared his arm to the other's lancet.

Two months afterwards Sir Geoffrey received the following letter from Percival, written under compulsion at his wife's dictation :—

Dear Cousin,—Actuated by feelings of passion, which, as you yourself once justly remarked, renders one's actions invalid, I addressed you a communication, some time ago, the terms of which I sincerely regret. When the blood of the

ffriendells is up they are apt to express themselves strongly; and you are the last man (except me) not to make allowances for the fact. I am thankful to say my dearest Mary has been raised from her bed of sickness, and is now—I had almost written ‘herself again;’ but though she is as well as ever, this is not the case. She has in a very singular, though perfectly scientific manner, become somebody else. She has undergone the operation of transfusion at the hands—or rather the arm—of Cavendish Lascelles, whose noble blood, to use the words of the poet, now ‘courses through her veins.’ One has so often heard of persons who are ready to shed the last drop of their blood for this or that, and so seldom seen them shed even the first drop, that you may have put them down in the same category with ghosts; but I saw this with my own eyes [for Percival had been present at the operation], and can swear to it. I owe a debt to Lascelles which I can never repay, for he brought back to life the dear girl I married yesterday. Both she and I are well convinced that our union will have your approbation, since the sole objection you had to it has been removed—by transfusion.

By birth, it is true, she is still a Blake, but by blood, she is a Lascelles.

With our united kind regards, I am yours truly,

PERCIVAL FFIENDELL.

Poor Sir Geoffrey, thus confronted not only with a dilemma, but an anomaly, was at his wit’s end—which was at no great distance.

In this extremity he consulted his oracle, an ancient nurse, who had dwelt in the household almost for that term of years scouted by Mr. Thoms, and who believed in the ffriendells first and Providence afterwards.

‘It’s my opinion, Sir Geoffrey,’ said this female sage, ‘as it’s no use crying over spilt milk.’

The Baronet himself was already partly of that opinion; so the reconciliation was effected, and the young couple were invited to the Court.

The bride, less from interested motives than from the sense that the old man had so much to ‘get over’ in his welcome to her, devoted herself to her host and soon surpassed her husband in Sir Geoffrey’s favour.

‘You are not only a ffriendell by name, my dear,’ he once said to her, ‘but, thanks to science, have become worthy of the race by nature. You were always very nice—in your way—but there were points before that fortunate operation—’ But there,’ he added, patting her little hand, ‘we will not speak of them now.’

‘You mean I used to say “ospital” for “hospital,”’ she answered, ‘hanging her beautiful head,’ like the rose immortalized by Cowper. ‘But I was always taught to do that, and also to say “umble” for “humble.”’

‘My dear,’ he said quite gravely, ‘you used to drop all your hs dreadfully.’ (She spoke as purely as Lindley Murray.) ‘But

transfusion has picked them up for you. Depend upon it there is nothing like blood.'

Mrs. Percival Fendall was a woman, but she knew when not to have the last word.

'What is the use of arguing with people,' said she to her husband (when he called her a humbug), 'who spell their name with two little fs ?'

Kildhurm's Oak.

CHAPTER I.

OLD LADY MAINWARING.

I SEE by the papers that this grand old lady is dead. She had passed her eighty-ninth birthday. Born in a year when Warren Hastings was still on his trial for high crimes and misdemeanours, the only child of Sir Philip Kildhurm of Kildhurm Tower, she was married at seventeen to Captain Frank Mainwaring, of His Britannic Majesty's Navy—a man who enjoyed the distinction of being wounded at Trafalgar. Captain Mainwaring (knightsed in 1811 on acceding to his uncle's estates) died in 1840; he left two sons and a daughter. Both the sons died in the cholera epidemic of 1832, unmarried. The daughter was wedded to a gentleman of family and estate, and accompanied him to India, where he held some official position. But this whole family (several children had been born) were murdered in the Sepoy outbreak. Thus it came about that, for the last twenty years, Lady Mainwaring has been the sole survivor of her race; and now she is gone, they are extinct.

She was a grand, serene old lady: with a noble face, whose beauty time could not altogether take away, and a majestic figure that scarcely stooped beneath the weight of fourscore years and nine. Her eyes were remarkable—large, black, and keen, and innocent of spectacles to the very end; but her hair, famous two generations since for its sable luxuriance, became in later times snow-white, although the long arched eyebrows kept their former hue. A wonderful old lady: endowed to the last with singular personal fascination, her manner the perfection of gentle dignity, in looking at her, or listening to the inflections of her low deep voice, you felt that hers was a spirit of no ordinary capacities and powers. But she was the descendant of no ordinary ancestry. Several of her progenitors had been endowed with gifts of the kind that modern science is always no less quick to explain away than slow to explain, but in which the folk of a less sophisticated age did powerfully and potently believe. I am not at this moment concerned to enter upon a discussion of supernatural phenomena, so called, beyond remarking that no physiologist can pretend to any right to be heard at all on the subject: the credulity which can

believe witchcraft and sorcery to be the bugbears of a diseased imagination being too gross to command attention. Reasonable people believe that the human body has a soul ; that there is a spiritual sight answering to the bodily sight ; and that when this spiritual sight is opened, it must inevitably behold the objects of a spiritual world. Concerning the spiritual world two or three facts, at least, are self-evident. Being a world of the mind, only the laws of the mind can hold sway there ; it is therefore free from the trammels of space and time. Further, it is a world of real substance, in contradistinction to the apparent substantiality of the world of matter. Thus far logic carries us ; and we do not at present need to go farther. For if man, living as to his body in the material world, lives at the same time as to his spirit in the spiritual world, then prophecy, soothsaying, second-sight, or whatever ‘miracle’ involves the transgression of no spiritual principle, becomes only the corollary of our theorem. The wonder-workers of old are justified. As for the Charlatans, they are not tricksters merely, but profaners, whose doom is spiritual death.

It was not unknown to some of the more intimate of Lady Mainwaring’s friends that she possessed abnormal powers ; and though she was constitutionally reserved in her communications, she occasionally came out with some noteworthy utterance on the subject. But if she saw and knew things beyond the ordinary scope, these influenced her spiritual rather than her material existence. She was well poised ; there was no one-sidedness in her character ; the spirit was so soundly and healthily wedded to the body that neither was in excess ; they performed their several functions in such harmony that one was seldom engaged apart from the other. But although this was happily the case with Lady Mainwaring, it had been otherwise with some of her ancestors. They could not walk the world with even and measured steps, but ever and anon plunged or soared into abysses which no mortal plummet has sounded. In Lady Mainwaring’s later years, a spirit of sweet and dignified garrulity occasionally inspired her, under the influence of which she would relate to discreet and sympathetic ears many strange particulars both of her own and of her fore-fathers’ history. Now that she is gone, I am at liberty to reproduce some of these communications ; giving them, so far as is possible, a connected and consecutive form. Her singularly fascinating narrative faculty, however, I cannot pretend to imitate. She was full of unrhymed and unwritten poetry of an elevated and mystic stamp. She had no ambition to be a writer, and after all she could never have done herself justice on paper. Whoever had listened to the subdued melody of her tones, flexible, various, con-

trolled, and reflecting every emotional phase of the tale as it was told ; whoever had felt the blood shrink to his heart at crises of the story, marked by a slight movement of her long white hands, a quiver of the black brows, an unexpected hush in the voice— whoever had had experience of this would have known that it was not to be sought on any printed page. Yet there was nothing histrionic in Lady Mainwaring's demeanour. A person sitting a dozen yards away from her could not have distinguished a word she said, and would scarcely have perceived that she was making use of gestures to enforce her meaning. It needed a close eye to catch all the subtle play of that venerable countenance.

The story I have compiled begins at a period now distant ; yet the series of events appears compact and coherent. What fact is there more tough and undeniable than an oak in an English park ? Yet, firmly rooted though it be among the things of to-day, its beginnings date back a thousand years ; it is a creature of the Dark Ages, a contemporary of legendary heroes and heroines, giants and fairies. It is a tangible proof of the mysterious past ; but, in bringing vanished ages into the light of the passing moment, it takes from them the very reality whereof they testify.

CHAPTER II.

SIR BRIAN'S TROUBLES.

THE Oak of Kildhurm does not date back a thousand years. Its exact age is not known, but it grew to be a sturdy vegetable, great of girth and royal in its spread of limb. It was first recognisable as a tree in the hither outskirts of Queen Elizabeth's time, or in King James's earlier years : about the epoch, say, of the Gunpowder Treason, when the struggles between King and Parliament which culminated in the rebellion of two-score years later were just beginning : when people wore ruffs and tight waists, and cultivated a stiffness of aspect as if they were continually sitting for their portraits ; when the names of Bacon, Raleigh, Shakespeare, and Drake had as yet acquired no legendary halo ; when gentlemen were haughty and punctilious, wore long swords with basket hilts, and were bloodthirstily polite in using the same ; when women were almost as beautiful and virtuous as they are at the present day, but less squeamish upon certain points ; when Spain was as much of a scapegoat for English vituperation as Russia is now ; when popery was not merely a picturesque opinion, but a matter of blazing faggots and iron virgins ; when El Dorado still gleamed along the horizons of the Spanish main. At about this time it

was that two men riding in opposite directions along a lonely road, met beneath a huge oak tree, whose gnarled limbs, thickly clothed with sombre foliage, extended nearly across the way.

The name of only one of these men has been preserved to us by tradition. Sir Brian Kildhurm, a valiant knight of Queen Elizabeth's manufacture, had fought with distinction in the Spanish wars, and afterwards (though himself of Irish descent) had unsheathed his sword for the repression of the Irish difficulties of that day. He owned a fair estate on the coast of Cumberland, a castle with a broad-bottomed tower on its seaward corner, a little black-haired son, and a very beautiful wife. With regard to this same wife, however, there was a difficulty, it would be hard to say exactly what: but, at all events, the personage who chanced to encounter Sir Brian beneath the overhanging branches of the oak tree on the lonely road was, in Sir Brian's opinion, in some way responsible for it.

They reined-in their horses, and exchanged a few words, which were doubtless of a courteous but hardly of a conciliating tendency. Each wore some light armour on head, arms, and breasts, high heavy boots, and the customary sword and dagger. But it is to be noted that, whereas Sir Brian's sword was of the rapier description, that of his opponent was a ponderous double-edged weapon, fitter to be wielded with two hands than with one. Its owner, however, was a man of vast size and strength, broad of beam and massive of limb, and with a great sheaf of rough red beard blowing about his face and chest; and he could flirt the huge sword about as lightly as if it had been a bamboo walking-stick. Sir Brian, on the other hand, like all the men of his race, was tall, lithe, and agile, and terribly skilful of fence.

It will be understood that these details would not have been dwelt upon, had the encounter between the two gentlemen been destined to pass off peacefully. But peace was far from the hearts of either of them. They meant deadly mischief to one another; and Sir Brian at least had long looked for an opportunity of doing his share of it. Accordingly, after levelling a proper amount of fantastic and quaint abuse at one another, these two sons of Adam dismounted from their steeds, placed themselves face to face on the greensward beneath the oak tree, and then and there presently set to work to spill each other's life-blood. Meanwhile, their horses peaceably cropped the herbage, and took the little intermission in their labours in very good part.

Sir Brian never appeared to have a chance against his gigantic adversary. What avails a cunning guard, when sheer strength beats it down, and when blow follows blow so rapidly and with

such outrageous force, that the wiriest opponent has much ado to hop out of the way of them, leaving all attempt at retaliation out of the question for the present? In spite of Sir Brian's best activity, the giant's weapon several times reached his body, crushing the light plates of iron armour, and once or twice biting through them to the flesh. 'The caitiff must needs wax scant of breath ere long,' thought Sir Brian to himself, as he saw that steel flail flash up and down; but it was dangerous work waiting for that time to arrive. In a moment a blow fell upon his helmet, sheared away the left side of it, and grazed the scalp, so that blood rushed forth and made gory the knight's face and gorget. A little giddy from this shock, Sir Brian staggered, his knees bent, and his neck felt an inch or two shorter than was comfortable. Perceiving this, his enemy resolved to make an end of him forthwith; for there was no question of giving quarter in this fight, but one or both must never fight again. Grasping his sword with both hands, therefore, he poised it for a back-stroke into which he threw the whole force and weight of his body. Sir Brian, glancing dizzily up, saw the keen blade glitter above him; then down it came—but not all the way down! For in mid descent it came in contact with a low-lying limb of the oak tree—nine inches thick of hard living wood—sheared through it to the last half-inch, and the hilt flew from the striker's grasp. His arms dropped to his sides, tingling to the shoulder. At the same moment Sir Brian had lunged forward with the strength of despair, and his rapier passed clean through the other's neck, who fell backwards with a groan and a gurgle, breaking the rapier-blade short off in the wound. He never spoke a word, but bled like a bull, and in a few minutes was dead.

Sir Brian Kildhurm leaned upon the fragment of his sword, recovering his breath, and staring at the red-bearded face of his dead enemy.

'So much for my Lady Ursula's sweetheart!' he muttered to himself.

After standing a little longer, he wiped his sword and slapped it home in the sheath; unlaced and flung away the pieces of his helmet; and at length, kneeling on one knee beside the burly corpse, he cut open with his dagger the front of the doublet. A broad gold chain and locket were revealed, the sight whereof caused Sir Brian's lean visage to wrinkle itself painfully. He took up the locket, sticky as it was with blood, and opened it. It contained, not the lock of crisp black hair that he had put in it ten years ago, but a soft brown coil of a woman's braid. He closed the locket and thrust it into his bosom. He took his enemy's dagger, which

was richly inlaid and wrought ; and finally he broke off from the branch whose interposition had saved his life a twig with a cluster of acorns growing upon it. These also he dabbled with blood ; then he mounted and rode slowly away, leaving the corpse and the other horse beneath the oak tree.

This fight took place on a cool and breezy afternoon in the month of October, in a small valley between Dent Hill and Ennerdale Water, in Cumberland. The horse remained beside his dead master until nightfall, because the latter's beard, blowing to and fro in the breeze, made him seem to be alive. But at night the horse trotted away, and by sunrise was standing at the gates of a Catholic monastery, fifty miles south-eastward of that fatal spot.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER, MOTHER, AND SON.

SIR BRIAN rode north and west, crossing a small river, where he stopped to bathe his wounds, and then forward again for six or seven miles, until he came to the sea-coast and to the Kildhurm estates. It was already dusk when he dismounted in the courtyard of his castle. He had been absent for some weeks, and he had not been expected home so soon ; nevertheless he was welcomed back most respectfully. He made no allusion to his late encounter at Ennerdale, but put on a gracious demeanour, and seemed altogether in unusually good spirits. When his wife came out to meet him, holding their little son by the hand, he greeted her with more than his customary urbanity ; and stooped to kiss the boy, who, however, shrank away from him with an odd cry of aversion, as if he had smelt a death-scent in his breath.

‘He should be trained to better manners,’ said the knight, with a smile.

‘He should see the world, then,’ answered the wife.

‘Are we so wholly apart from the world,’ returned Sir Brian, fixing his eyes upon her, ‘that no guests, bidden or unbidden, ever pass our gates ?’

‘Who should visit us in a spot so remote as this ?’ exclaimed Lady Kildhurm. ‘It is much if now and then we catch sight of some clownish tenant of ours, riding by on the road beyond the park.’

‘You love London better—is it not so ?’

‘I was bred in London, Brian, and would gladly see it again. When we married, thou didst promise me sometimes to return

thither. But now for three years I have not been a day's ride from the castle.'

'Indeed, I have been remiss, Ursula; but thou knowest how vexed the country hath been of late, and I ever commanded hither and thither by our gracious monarch. But I had hoped thou wouldest have found some company in thy solitude.'

'Last night we had a visitor,' spoke up the boy, looking up in his mother's face. 'I saw him—the big man with the Red Beard—'

'Silence, sirrah!' interrupted the knight, with a stern voice and frown. 'What art thou, to contradict thy mother to her face! Look how thy impudence hath made her blush! Off to thy nurse, and let me hear thy babble no more to-day. Would a big red-bearded man have been here, and thy mother not have told me of it?' And hereupon Sir Brian laughed.

After the boy had been taken away, he sat down in his high-backed chair beside the hearth, and motioned with his hand to Lady Kildhurm to seat herself opposite him.

'This is a lonely spot, indeed,' he said, 'and withal none too safe for an unarmed man to ride abroad. Even this very afternoon, Ursula, as I was spurring along the road by Ennerdale Water, thinking of the loving and wifely welcome thou wouldest give me on my arrival here; I was set upon by a brawny ruffian, a huge, bearded varlet, with a sword a cloth-yard and a half long. We fought beneath the Great Oak; and he would have cloven me to the chine, save that, as good luck would have it, he caught his blade against a branch, so that he lost his hold upon the hilt. But my peril was great. See, I have brought away a twig of the tree for remembrance of my escape.'

So saying, he drew forth from his breast the cluster of acorns, and held it towards his wife.

'There is blood upon it!' cried Lady Kildhurm, snatching back her half-extended hand. 'Brian—what man was this?'

'What man?' he repeated with a short laugh. 'What but a robber, Ursula, who would rob me of what I hold most precious? But methinks his ill deeds are at an end now!'

'What hast thou done to him?' she asked, trembling very much.

'Nay, I did but pass my rapier through his weazand,' replied the knight, keeping his black eyes on her face. 'Indeed, he was not worthy to die by the hand of a true man, but should rather have been hanged on the tree beneath which he fell, as a warning to all such vermin. But in the hurry of the moment I stood not upon ceremony. . . . Do not turn so pale, Ursula! Comfort thyself,

dear wife—I got but a scratch or so, which will be healed long ere the crows have made a meal of his carcase.'

'This afternoon—by the Oak of Ennerdale?' said Lady Kildhurm in a dull voice, her eyes wide open and fixed.

'And, by the bye, I took a trophy from him—a pretty trinket enough—and have brought it to hang about thy neck as a keepsake. See—pure gold it is, and in its shape strangely like the one I gave thee years ago, and which thou hast doubtless kept so religiously ever since. But this has in it, not my hair, but a braid cut from some woman's head—his light-o'-love's, I take it. Throw that away as unworthy thy chaste ownership: but accept the gold from thy loving husband, Ursula!'

When Lady Kildhurm beheld this sure evidence that what she had perhaps foreboded had come to pass, her trembling ceased, and she became strangely composed. She held out her hand for the locket.

'Give it me,' she said. 'Ay, it is pretty, indeed; and I thank thee for it more than for any other gift of thine. Why, this too is smeared with blood; but my lips shall cleanse it—I will kiss it, kiss it, till all is kissed away. And I will wear it in my bosom, Brian, and it shall never come forth thence—never while I live, I promise thee! Thou canst not say I did not prize this gift! The cluster of acorns—give me them also. Hast thou anything else for me?'

'Here is his dagger,' returned the knight with an attempt at a sneer. 'Thou mayst find a use for that, perhaps!'

She took the dagger, and then, standing erect before her husband, she met his glance unflinchingly. 'Farewell, Brian,' said she. 'Thou hast been a hard and unloving husband to me. Often, when I would have clung to thee, thou hast put me aside with cold and sneering words, and hast shut me out from that confidence and fair entertainment which a wife should have. For years thou hast confined me to this solitude! travelling abroad thyself, and leaving me here, your wife only in name, and as yielding meek obedience to your tyrannous will. Thou hast neither loved, honoured, nor cherished me, and since these two years I have known that thou hast held me in suspicion. God alone knows, or ever shall know, whether the suspicion was just. This is my revenge—that I will leave thee in doubt! But hadst thou been kinder to me, Brian—hadst thou answered the craving of my overwrought heart—hadst thou been true to thy duty as a husband, thou wouldst not have thought me failing in mine as a wife. But I do not ask forgiveness: be God judge between us, which has most wronged the other!'

‘ You have much to say about God, madam,’ broke in Sir Brian: ‘ but my fear is, your deeds are less heavenly than your words.’

‘ Look to thy own deeds ! for they shall condemn thee for ever ! ’ exclaimed Lady Kildhurm, raising both her hands, one holding the dagger, and the other the cluster of acorns, and then letting them droop slowly towards him. ‘ Thou hast slain a good and holy man, whose shoe’s latchet thou wast not worthy to unlace. Evil shall be thy portion in this world : and if ever thou turnest thy steps heavenward, may the blood which thou hast this day shed cause thee to slip and stumble in the way ! ’

Having thus spoken, Lady Kildhurm retired to her chamber. Sir Brian sat alone in his high-backed chair by the fire-place, resting his lean cheek upon his hand, and staring at the embers. When a servant came to bring him supper, he gave the man so black a look as to send him frightened back ; and during the rest of the night, no one ventured to approach the room. As the hours passed away, every sound was hushed, except the heavy thundering of the surf against the shore, and the whipping of the wind-driven foam against the windows. Once Sir Brian fancied he heard an outcry and a sobbing, as of a child in distress,—the voice of his little son ; but by degrees the sobbing died away.

In the early morning, as Sir Brian stood at the window, he saw the grey sea hurling itself at the bare coast, and the sea-gulls skimming and eddying amidst the bitter foam of the great breakers. The grey walls of Kildhurm Tower, which stood scarce a hundred paces from the shore, were heavy with clinging flakes of froth. Directly opposite the window where Sir Brian was standing, on the verge of the low headland, lay a heap of something that had not been there the evening before. Was it a mass of sea-wrack, cast up by the waves during the night ? Sir Brian could not see clearly ; the window-pane was dim with salt, and his eyes were heavy. He stealthily left the room, descended the staircase, and, bareheaded as he was, crossed the wind-swept breadth of turf that intervened between the Tower and the headland.

There lay the body of his wife, face downwards, with arms outstretched, and hands that clutched the turf. It was a spot to which she had often come to sit, and to gaze for hours westward across the waves towards Mona, where she was born. Sir Brian stood looking down at her, as he had stood by that other dead body the day before. He had been the death of them both. At first, indeed, he did not quite believe that she was dead. He watched for some movement of those fingers which clutched so sharply into the turf, those soft white fingers that yesterday had

been so tremulous. But there was no tremor in them now; they were rigid as iron: the wind which fluttered her garments could not stir them. Poor little hands! Perhaps, after all, Sir Brian had not pressed them so lovingly or so often as he might have done. He remembered how, sometimes, when they had touched his hair or his cheek, he had moodily disregarded their touch, or had brushed them impatiently away. What hands would caress him now? ‘Hadst thou not failed in thy duty as a husband?’ and again: ‘Mayst thou slip and stumble in the blood which thou hast this day shed!’ Those were words which could never be unspoken. And yet Sir Brian waited beside the body, as if he expected it to arise and speak to him.

But at length, setting his teeth together, he laid hold of the body, and placed it face upwards across his knee. As he did so, the cause of death was revealed. She had planted the dagger point upwards in the earth, and had fallen upon it. Something else she had planted there, though at the time Sir Brian did not know it—the acorns from the fatal oak of Ennerdale; and she had fertilised them with her very heart’s blood.

Some of the servants, who had been peeping out from the castle windows, aghast at so grim a spectacle, now made bold to approach and offer their assistance. Sir Brian, however, as if he had not seen them, rose, lifting the corpse in his arms, and stalked in silence up the ascent to the castle gate, neither staggering nor pausing by the way. The servants followed in a group after him.

When he got to the gate, he was met by his little son, who had his father’s black hair and eyes, and his mother’s tremulous indignant mouth. The child’s nurse had in vain striven to keep him out of the way, and from a knowledge of what had happened. He seemed, indeed, to know more about it than any one else.

‘My dear mamma is dead!’ quoth the infant heir of Kildhurm, his cheeks flushing scarlet and his childish voice vibrating. ‘You have killed her, you wicked father, and I will never, never forgive you!’

Sir Brian stopped short, and his teeth began to chatter.

‘Take the brat away!’ he cried out.

But at the same moment his strength forsook him, and he would have fallen on his own threshold, had not those behind upheld him, and carried him and the dead woman into the castle. The stark warrior never fully recovered from the effects of this adventure.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OAK BEGINS TO GROW.

THIS is the legend of the planting of Kildhurm's Oak. It has, indeed, been affirmed that the child's words were literally true, and that Lady Kildhurm died actually and not figuratively by her husband's hand. But there is no trustworthy evidence in support of such a charge, and it may therefore be discredited. The fact remains that father and son were never reconciled ; not because the latter held to his childish threat, but because Sir Brian conceived an unconquerable dread of him, and would never willingly have him in his presence. All accounts agree in representing this hitherto fearless man as having become a victim to superstitious terrors, and as having lapsed into an altogether morbid state of mind. In his sleep he was often heard to shriek out unintelligible words in a choking voice, and sometimes, in the midst of company, he would have the air of suddenly being confronted with sights and sounds to which none but he were sensible. He would point to the ground with his finger, it is said, muttering and staring, and occasionally drawing back his feet, as if to avoid treading upon some imaginary horror. This latter peculiarity was first noticed in him on the day of his wife's funeral. All the chief personages in the neighbourhood had been invited to the ceremony, and a large concourse of people had assembled out of curiosity. The darksome procession had entered the churchyard of the Gothic church that stood in the midst of the village about a mile from Kildhurm Tower. The coffin was being carried in beneath the arched portal, when Sir Brian set his foot on the first of the seven stone steps which led up thither. All at once, to the surprise and discomfiture of the beholders, he halted abruptly, and then gave back a pace or two. His eyes, meanwhile, were observed to be rigidly fixed on the clean and smooth-worn steps before him. Sir Brian slowly extended his arm, with finger outstretched, and seemed to trace therewith the course of some sluggishly-moving thing that crept towards him along the flags, and which, assuredly, nobody except himself could perceive.

'Look, look ! 'tis running down the steps ! Merciful God ! where should so much come from ?' he whispered between his chattering teeth.

Whispered though the words were, they were caught up by those nearest him, and by them communicated to others. An awkward and irresolute pause followed ; the funeral *cortége*

wavered, and forsook its narrow regularity, and a group of curious, startled, and questioning faces grouped themselves around the knight, who still glared downward, shivering and distraught. At length the clergyman of the parish, an elderly, stern-visaged man, made his way through the press, and laid his hand upon the stricken man's shoulder.

'Honoured Sir Knight,' said he, 'let not a grief which is most natural, and worthy of all respect, overcome you at this moment; for all the people stand amazed, and know not what to do. Go forward, I entreat you, into the church, that the last sad rites may be performed, and the assembly dismissed.'

Thus admonished, Sir Brian pressed both his hands across his eyes, and made a hurried and desperate attempt to reach the church door. But on the first step he slipped and fell headlong, shrieking out in a voice that rang over the crowd and penetrated to the coffin-bearers within the aisle—

'I am cursed! Her blood is upon me!'

It was an ugly and an ominous spectacle. No further attempt was made to induce him to enter the church, nor is it likely that any such attempt would have succeeded. From his behaviour, and from sundry obscure sentences that fell from him, it was inferred that the arched doorway, to his apprehension, was sentinelled by some grisly phantom that waved him back. And it is worthy of note that from this time to the very end of his life, he never made his way into the house of God, or even would accept the ministrations of any member of the sacred profession. To strive to bring his mind into a religious frame was tantamount to throwing him into one of his fits of superstitious delirium; so that those last words of his wife, on parting with him for ever—'May the blood which thou hast this day shed cause thee to slip and stumble in thy way heavenward!'—would seem to have found a sufficiently ample fulfilment.

The fact that he never saw his wife buried, by the way, may account for the notion which constantly possessed him that she was still in some shape or other (a very appalling one, seemingly) above ground. In other words, the man was haunted for the remainder of his days by a spectre; possibly by more than one: but that is a point not easy to determine, since he was the only person to whom it or they were visible. He contracted a habit of betaking himself at certain hours to that particular point on the cliff where the body of Lady Kildhurm had been found: being thereto impelled, we may suppose, not because the place was agreeable to him—for it is probable that no place in the world was less so—but by that perverse horror which is known by the name

of fascination, and which drives the fluttering sparrow into the open jaws of the snake. Having regard to all these eccentricities of his, it is not surprising that he came to be considered as a man accursed—incapable of being of use to any human creature, and therefore to be avoided of all. It must be recollected that this was the beginning of the seventeenth century ; nobody allows himself to fall into any delusions nowadays. And it will be easy for the philosophers of our enlightened age to account for Sir Brian's mania, and his notions about phantoms, as a result of that astounding buffet on the head which he received from him of the Red Beard ; a buffet rude enough, certainly, to have disorganised brains stronger than those of the Knight of Kildhurm. There remains, it is true, the question why such a cause should be followed by such an effect ; but to insist upon this would be, perhaps, but the refinement of idle curiosity.

The violent extinction of these two lives—of Lady Kildhurm's and of him of the Red Beard—was suffered to pass without legal inquiries, or at all events without legal penalties. The north of England, at this period, was not in a particularly peaceful or settled condition ; and, what is more to the purpose, the red-bearded man was known to have been ardently attached to the Roman Catholic religion ; and he was doubtless suspected by some of having affiliations with the authors of the Gunpowder Treason. No one, of course, who set any value upon the security of his own vertebra, would care to espouse the cause of a person of whom such things could be said, especially after taking into consideration the fact that the person was no longer alive. As for Lady Kildhurm, if it were true that she had carried on an intrigue with a traitor and conspirator, what more probable and easy to be believed than that she should have sympathised with his political and religious views into the bargain ? For when women give themselves up to love, it is their happiness to give themselves without reservation of soul, mind, or body. Let Lady Kildhurm and her lover, therefore, if they needed avenging, manage the matter for themselves, and in their own way.

And, surely, no one who was present at the deathbed of Sir Brian Kildhurm would have ventured to affirm that the blood of those two was unavenged. But over that grim scene let a veil be drawn. After all, Lady Kildhurm may have been innocent ; and if Sir Brian found this out when it was too late, his fate was in no respect an enviable one.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROPHECY OF THE OAK.

RALPH KILDHURM—that bold-spoken youngster who bearded his father at the castle gate—had a grand career. His life covers the period of the Puritan Revolution. He was a devoted adherent of King Charles; probably not more from personal sympathy with that unhappy monarch, than because he knew that the Stuarts' cause would have been his mother's, had she been alive. He met his death valiantly at Naseby. But he had married two years previously, and two sons came of the union, one of whom was born six months after his decease. This younger son was destined to be his successor.

Our affair being the story of the Oak, and of the family mainly in so far as it was involved therewith, I can give few further details about Sir Ralph. Charles made the rank of baronet hereditary in his line. Ralph, it is said, had always taken great interest in the growth of the infant oak tree; as was no wonder, considering that it had been planted by his mother under circumstances so darkly impressive. At the time of Sir Brian's death, the tree had grown to about the height of a man: it flourished with strange vigour. The story of its origin was not unknown in the neighbourhood, and many quaint and fantastic sayings and prophecies concerning it were rife among the people of the neighbourhood. Its rapid growth was plausibly ascribed to the blood which had drenched the soil at its planting; and it was affirmed that this blood had been absorbed into the life and substance of the tree, imparting to it a kind of semi-human vitality; so that, although in outward semblance an oak, much like other oaks, it was in reality a species of oak-man—an offspring, in fact, of the valiant race of Kildhurm, born of the alleged unhallowed union between Lady Kildhurm and the Red-Bearded one. Therefore its destiny was bound up with that of the Kildhurms; but whether for weal or for woe was a question as to which different people held different opinions. Some said that, since from evil no good could come, and since Lady Kildhurm had died in sin, the tree that sprang from her blood was an accursed growth instinct with a demon of violence and mischief, and sure, sooner or later, to work harm upon its human kindred. Others, on the contrary, maintained that the charge against Ursula was—in its blacker construction, at all events—a calumny; that he of the Red Beard had been a priest or a monk in disguise, and that the intrigue in which the two were concerned had for its object nothing worse than the

furtherance of some religious scheme. Consequently, urged these charitably-disposed persons, the blood which fertilised the planted acorns was the blood of innocence wrongfully accused ; and might be expected to carry with it a blessing rather than a curse.

But hereupon the first party would reply that, whether Ursula were guilty or innocent of the crime charged against her, there could at all events be little doubt that she had taken her own life, and no doubt at all that the latest words she spoke to her husband were a deliberate curse. Now, it was a fact established upon Scriptural authority that the evil effect of a curse descends from father to son even unto the third and fourth generation—and this, whether the person who pronounced the anathema desired such an amplification of it or not : curses being like demons, which, once evoked, are not easily laid again. Upon the whole, therefore, it seemed probable that the Kildhurms would fare badly with their oak ; yet it appears never to have occurred to anybody to try the effect of rooting the oak up, or cutting it down. But very likely nobody would have been found venturesome enough to act upon the idea, even had it been suggested. Such a proceeding, under the circumstances, would have been regarded as little better than murder, if not a good deal worse : for although Dante could scarcely have been familiar to the Kildhurm family, and still less to the peasantry of that epoch, a belief was widely prevalent that if an axe should be laid to the tree, or so much as a twig torn off it, blood would flow from the wound. And to such a pitch was this grotesque notion carried, that during many years the dead leaves and fallen boughs of the oak are said to have been religiously buried, as if they had been veritable human remains. I do not care to vouch for the truth of this legend, but that it should have existed even as a legend is significant of the serious light in which the whole matter was viewed.

It was during Sir Ralph's lifetime that some local Mother Shipton produced the famous prophetic verses which were ever thenceforward quoted when the Oak and its attributes came up for discussion ; and as to the true meaning of which a great deal of speculation and dispute were rife. What may have been the merits of the question can be inferred only from the sequel ; but meanwhile it is certain that the prophecy itself so far appealed to the pride or interests of the Kildhurm family, that they caused it to be engraved upon a silver disc, and hung round the bole of the tree by a silver chain. There is no evidence of this chain and the disc ever having been removed ; and the story goes that they were gradually overgrown by the substance of the tree ; until, by the time the prophecies were ripe for fulfilment, the silver record

of them had disappeared. The verses, according to the most trustworthy accounts, ran somewhat as follows :—

Here stand I, Kildhurm's Oak,
Ne'er to fall by age or stroke.;
E'er Two Hundred Years be run,
Death of three and wealth of one.

At the period to which these verses are assigned, the Kildhurms had no lack of worldly goods, so that the concluding words might have seemed uncalled for. But they did not long continue to lack significance. For, after King Charles had suffered on the block, and the Protector ruled over England, those Englishmen who had favoured the dead King's cause were bound to suffer both in life and lands. Sir Ralph, as we know, had already paid the former penalty ; but his surviving relatives were constrained to pay the other. In addition to a fine in money of 15,000*l.* they were deprived of by far the larger part of their landed possessions ; nothing, indeed, was left to them but half a dozen acres of barren land, and the Tower of Kildhurm itself. Of course it was a cause for thankfulness that the Tower was not taken too ; it was not every Royalist, in those days, who could boast of owning a roof to cover him. Probably, on the other hand, the Kildhurms could have got on better, from a practical point of view, with a little less stone and mortar and a little more gold. All but two or three of the servants had to be dismissed ; the domestic expenses had to be cut down to the very lowest figure ; and there was the once rich and powerful family, now reduced to half a dozen persons all told, living in one corner of a castle capable of accommodating fifty guests with their retinues. It was a fine place, no doubt, for children to play at hide-and-seek in ; but a sad place for the elders who remembered the glories of the past.

The Oak had now completed its first half-century, and was already a noble and stalwart tree. It was an object of almost religious care on the part of the family ; they cherished for it the same gloomy and perverse sort of pride that other old families do for the exploits of some godless ancestor, or for some hereditary vice or physical defect in themselves. A low railing had been built round the tree to protect it from careless and irreverent approach, and the little space of turf therein enclosed was kept scrupulously free from rubbish. The tree, however, possessed so much vigour of its own, that it would have flourished under the most adverse circumstances. It bade fair, if opportunity were given it, to become one of the great oaks of England. The trunk was modelled on lines of exceeding strength ; the lower main branches, three in number, diverged from one another at equal

angles, and extended their level lengths so far that the seaward limb overhung the verge of the cliff. The foliage was thick and dark, and the leaves, in autumn, if seen against the light, showed a deep tinge of crimson. Rain could not penetrate through their manifold living roof; and the shadow they cast upon the ground beneath is said to have been so sombre and so cold, that even in the greatest heat of summer it would strike a subtle chill through the blood. Those persons who had the temerity to take a nap in this shadow, or even to stand in it too long, were visited by appalling dreams, and generally got an ague which lasted them the rest of their lives. It should be noted, however, that these untoward effects did not occur in the case of the members of the Kildhurm family, who, on the contrary, were fond of lingering about the tree: seeming to be sensible of a brotherhood with it, and to be agreeably affected by that which others found hurtful: insomuch that the children were brought to lie in their cradles beneath the boughs; and as they grew towards youth, their favourite playground was there.

In winter, when the tree stood forth stripped of its leaves, the peculiarities of its conformation were disclosed. Above the three main boughs, already described, the trunk rose nearly erect for a considerable height, and put forth two thick limbs, which, after growing outwards nearly horizontally for half their length, thence ascended perpendicularly with a sudden crook like an elbow; and finally divided and spread abroad in smaller claw-like branches. The effect, therefore, as viewed from a suitable distance, was as if a gigantic but distorted human figure were standing upon the lower trunk as a pedestal, and were uplifting above its head two long and rigid arms. Were those arms raised in defiance of heaven, or in supplication to it? Did they threaten mankind below, or scatter benisons upon them? These may have been disputed questions among the people of that age. Doubtless the popular imagination, stimulated as it must have been by the many wild stories current about the Oak, had much to do with giving the semblance of reality to these human-like attributes; and the Kildhurms themselves, having little except the tree left to put them in mind of their former dignities, would naturally do what they conscientiously could towards heightening the mystery and the interest which surrounded it. Nevertheless, after all proper and due allowances and deductions have been made, much still remains which, to say the least of it, is singular and suggestive, and which, in an era unenlightened by electricity and evolution, may well have seemed portentous.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UTTERANCE OF THE OAK.

THE coast of Cumberland, at the point where the Oak stood, is not more than twenty feet above ordinary high-water mark, and it opposes a face of dull white rock to the waves. But in storms, the Irish Sea drives down upon the shore with tremendous force, and the great rollers sometimes rise to the height of the natural parapet, and the gale bears their crests across it. The growth of an ordinary tree might have been stunted by such oceanic familiarities ; but the Oak of Kildhurm, so far from shrinking from them, seemed to find refreshment therein, and never failed to greet the rough play of the storm-inspired waves with outstretched arms of invitation, roaring back an answer to the hoarse clamour of the surf, and tossing its branches gleefully in the shriek of the blast. Occasionally it would send a cluster of leaves whirling out to sea, like a message to the spirit of the tempest : and often, in return, wreaths of dark seaweed were found suspended on its limbs—tokens of the ocean's savage amity. And again, when the winds were down, and the shining waters came lapping liquidly under the crag, the swarthy Oak was fain to bend its boughs over the verge, and see its darksome image in the mirror of the tide, and, one might fancy, silently communicate some mysterious secret, over which the smiling surface would close for ever, with only a gurgling whisper of acknowledgment, which no human ear could understand. And at night, when the moon was up, the sea would heave and break slowly in long complaining murmurs against the shore, as though calling to some friend that tarried late. And then, to those who looked from the castle windows, their eyes straining through the deceptive dusk, the solid Oak would seem to melt slowly away like a shadow, and so to vanish into the yearning bosom of the deep, leaving naught save its gloomy memory behind it. Yet, in the morning, when the yellow sun stood on the bare edge of the inland hill, the Oak of Kildhurm still towered in its place, staunch and immovable ; with nothing about it to tell of its nocturnal ramble, unless it were the long shadow trailing athwart the glistening beach. The sea and the Oak knew how to keep each other's secrets.

One October day, in the midst of the seventeenth century, Lady Kildhurm, in her widow's weeds, walked slowly out of the castle gate, leading her two little sons each by the hand. The elder, named Maurice, was six years old, his brother Rupert about five ; and this was Maurice's birthday. As the heir of Kildhurm,

all his birthdays were, of course, of particular importance ; and although he did not get quite so many testimonials of feudal devotion from the neighbouring peasants and farmers as his grandfather at the same age had been accustomed to expect, nevertheless he had spent a pleasant forenoon receiving the gifts and congratulations of an adoring household. It was now afternoon, the air clear and undisturbed by any wind, and sea and land slept in soft tints beneath the slanting sun-rays. Not a ripple disturbed the pale blue surface ; nor was any movement perceptible among the dark leaves of the mysterious tree. The mother and children proceeded to the cliff, and, opening the gate of the little enclosure, they seated themselves beneath the shadow of the Oak. Far away in the offing a vessel lay becalmed, her dim white sails vainly stretched out for a breeze ; near at hand a flock of fitfully-screaming gulls swooped and hovered over some floating quarry. A banner, hoisted on the Tower in honour of little Sir Maurice's sixth anniversary, hung in motionless folds about its staff. All nature seemed to be at pause, dreaming of the past, or, it might be, hushing herself in anticipation of some event to come.

Lady Kildhurm sat in a low rustic chair, with her hand beneath her chin, and her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the banner drooping on its staff. The children were playing on the mossy green turf at her feet. By and by Sir Maurice said to his brother, in reference to a small toy sword which had been absorbing their attention :

‘ Thou mayst take it awhile, brother ; but thou must say it is mine and not thine, else I will take it back.’

Rupert received the sword in silence, and then said :

‘ Bruzzer Mau’ice, dis s’ord is mine !’

‘ Now I shall take it back !’

‘ No !’

‘ Yes ; and I am the eldest ; and the sword and everything belong to me, and nothing to you. You shall not have it !’

‘ No ! I de eldest !’

‘ Rupert ! that was a—not true !’

‘ Well, I keep de s’oard !’ returned the unabashed junior, dwelling upon the noun at exasperating length.

Maurice made a snatch at the disputed weapon ; Rupert drew it quickly beyond his reach : then the two little fellows faced each other with defiance in their port ; and a battle seemed imminent.

But all of a sudden a low and deep sound began to make itself heard. It was like a whisper, hoarse, yet roughly melodious, issuing out of the very heart of the else omnipresent stillness ; and gradually gathering volume, until it roared on the ear like the far-

heard music of a cataract. Lady Kildhurm, roused from the reverie into which she had fallen, lifted her head and listened in surprise, and the children postponed their fisticuffs and listened also. What caused the sound? No wind had arisen; there hung the banner, idle as before; yonder stretched the sea in glassy immobility. A dark cloud, however, had crept before the face of the sun; and as the mother raised her glance, she perceived a strange commotion in the Oak. Its huge limbs swayed to and fro, and the thickly clustered leaves hurtled hither and thither, as though under the stress of a mighty breeze. It was from the Oak, then, and only from the Oak, that the multitudinous murmur came. Amidst the autumnal hush of that peaceful afternoon it was uplifting its voice in a many-toned tumult of harmony; and as the sound gained resonance, it seemed to the now pale-cheeked woman as if a voice, indistinct at first, was gradually shaping itself to intelligible utterance, approaching through numberless repetitions nearer and nearer to articulate speech.

Yes, after fifty years, the genius of the tree was full-born and awake, and striving with ten thousand tongues to give expression to his will. As the cry rose higher, he shook his swarthy arms towards the sea; and thereupon a long tidal wave, which had noiselessly been advancing shore-wards across the smooth expanse, burst in mellow thunder along the resounding shore. Slowly the echoes died away, and slowly, likewise, the wild voice of the tree subsided and was still. Everywhere the calm of the October day reigned as before—everywhere save in the mother's frightened heart. The cloud, moreover, still lingered before the sun.

Little Sir Maurice, who had observed this portent attentively throughout, now took hold of his mother's dress and looked up in her face.

'Didst thou hear, mother?' he demanded. 'The Oak said "Maurice! Maurice! Maurice!" over and over again. Why does it call me? Does it want me to go anywhere, or do anything? Tell me, mother!'

'Hush, child, thou talkest foolishly! can trees talk?' returned Lady Kildhurm, trying to hide her uneasiness beneath an assumed asperity. The next moment she bent down and kissed the boy with yearning tenderness on cheek and brow. Then she glanced fearfully at the unmoving masses of sombre foliage.

'Pray God he be not called from me!' she said half aloud. 'But how strange a thing! Pooh! it was my fancy!—nay, for he heard it also!—and then that great wave, like an answer from the sea! But—pshaw! I am more foolish still than my children. It was but some sudden wind-gust. I will think of it no more.'

Maurice, and thou, Rupert, come now into the house. The air is not so warm as an hour since.'

Rupert, it may be remarked, had kept stubborn hold of the sword all through this adventure, in which, for the rest, he had seen nothing at all remarkable. But he was a politic as well as an obstinate baby, and he now executed a diplomatic stroke which would have done credit to an older head.

'See what I dot, buzzer,' he said, as he and Maurice followed their mother towards the castle. He held up a cluster of acorns.

'Oh, how did you get them?'

'Dey fall on ze g'ound; dey very pooty!'

'I wish I had found some. I have always wanted some.'

'I give 'ou dese, if 'ou say I keep de s'oard,' said the diplomatist, hazarding his stroke.

'Oh, have you the sword still? I had forgot it. Well, I cannot give you the sword, because mother gave it to me; but if you will give me the acorns, you shall keep the sword till I want it.'

'Well, I keep de s'oard,' said Rupert, as he handed over the acorns. And it is to be feared that he added a mental rider to the effect that he would himself be the judge of the time when his brother should want it back again.

Lady Kildhurm, turning at the castle gate, saw the acorns in Maurice's grasp.

'Thou shouldest not have brought them, son,' she said nervously. 'Thou knowest we do not use to touch the fruit of the Oak. Run back and put them again where thou didst find them.'

'No, mother,' said Maurice, 'let me keep them. This is my birthday, and the Oak has given me these for a birthday gift.'

'Yes, muzzer, he keep 'em,' put in Rupert, who perceived that, if his brother was deprived of the acorns, his own possession of the sword might be thereby endangered. And the mother yielded, having no very valid arguments on her side, and being, besides, unwilling to cross the little heir on his birthday.

It was destiny, no doubt—destiny that would have fulfilled itself in some other way, if not in this. No outcry of child or demon disturbed Lady Kildhurm that night, after she had kissed the two boys in their cribs and bidden them farewell. Her sleep was peaceful and dreamless; but Maurice slept more soundly yet, and never awoke in this world. It was afterwards discovered that he had taken his acorns to bed with him; and the inference was that he must have eaten one of them, and that it had poisoned him. At all events, the Oak of Kildhurm had claimed and taken its first victim; and Master Rupert was free to keep the sword.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

(To be continued.)

Kildhurn's Oak.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OAK BIDES ITS TIME.

WHEN this strange story, with suitable exaggerations, got abroad, it added greatly to the Oak's reputation. The notion that it was to be a sort of Banshee of the Kildhurms, speaking with miraculous voice before the death of any member of the family—this notion had great vogue for a time; but the Oak itself declined to countenance it. Its soul, if it had one, was of a rank superior to that of Banshees, and would not be classed with them. Several members of the family died in due season, and in an ordinary manner, without any sign from the Oak. The tree, for a great number of years, behaved in all respects as another tree might have done. But it never could divest itself of its sinister reputation. Not uneducated people merely, but often those who pretend to some degree of culture, betray a disposition to put faith in a thing precisely because they are unable to explain it. Possibly some leaven of the inexplicable may be indispensable to a healthy mental organisation. It is inexplicable, so far as our knowledge of natural laws extends, that the leaves and branches of the Oak should have swayed and rustled independently of the action of the wind. On the other hand, if we assign a conscious and self-acting spirit to man, what shall prevent us from assigning the like to a tree? Before giving a too credulous ear to those who would persuade us that this or that is incredible because it is a miracle, it were prudent to require them to put their finger on something that is not miraculous.

Let the reader, therefore, form his own conclusions as to the special miraculousness of Kildhurn's Oak: noting, meanwhile, that little Rupert, the stubborn and wily, grew up to be a courtier; and, while still no more than a boy in his teens, was able on one or two occasions to render some important service to the second Charles, who was then awaiting with what patience he might the demise of the terrible Protector. On Charles's accession to power, Rupert was attached to his court, and, if all accounts be true, he approved himself a congenial abettor of the merry monarch's frolics. It was here that he made the acquaintance of John, Earl of Rochester, and the connection benefited him little either in health

or reputation. Nor did its ill effects stop there; for having, in the year 1678, invited a party of dissolute young nobles, of whom Rochester was one, to spend a few days at Kildhurm Tower, a most stupendous orgy forthwith began, which lasted nearly a week, and ended in the castle taking fire. There was no means of putting out the flames; and within six hours the only part of the building that remained habitable was the tower itself and one or two rooms adjoining it. This mishap happened in the winter; and the aspect of the naked Oak, lit up by the red glare of the conflagration, and standing forth against the sable background of sea and sky, was demoniacal in the extreme.

'Ods-life, my lads,' remarked the wild Earl, as he gazed upon it, 'it does look damnably like one of us as we shall be a few years sooner or later!'

This was one of the last escapades in which Rochester was concerned. He soon afterwards fell into that illness which proved to be his last, and in the course of which he formed his edifying friendship with good Bishop Burnet. As for Sir Rupert, the disaster sobered him, not only at the time, but permanently. He stayed at what was left of his home for the remainder of his days, married the daughter of a neighbouring baronet, and died full of years and piety, though poor in this world's goods, in the latter part of George I.'s reign. He had a son, of whom this history has nothing to say: but with that son's son, born about the time of the grandfather's decease, our narrative resumes its thread.

Sir Norman Kildhurm was a scholar of some eminence, and of a philosophical and speculative turn; he is said to have written several lengthy and abstruse works, all of which have withdrawn into a dignified and happy oblivion. Personally, he was an odd, unconventional genius, of uneven temper and behaviour. His mind, in some of its aspects, was amazingly lucid and sane; but in others it seemed to forsake all rationality and clearness, and immersed itself in clouds of mysticism and paradox. The family Oak had, as might readily be supposed, a profound attraction for him. He spent much time in studying it, and posterity is indebted to him for having gathered together all available scraps of its past history, both actual and apocryphal. Among other discoveries, he made the somewhat curious one that the Oak differed from all known species of the *Quercus* family, and was of another variety even than the Oak of Ennerdale, whereof tradition made it an off-shoot. Sir Norman boldly accounted for this difference by ascribing it to the strain of human blood which flowed in the tree's veins. Perhaps he may have known for a fact that a fluid which

was not vegetable sap coursed beneath the rough bark ; and, indeed, there is a rumour that he once dared to lop off one of the lesser branches, doubtless with a view to putting this questionable ichor to a chemical test. Whether the tree forgave the liberty in consideration of the importance of the result to be obtained, is open to question ; though probably any being directly connected, as the Oak was, with the operations of destiny, would be superior to petty emotions of revenge or partiality. It cannot be denied, on the other hand, that Sir Norman's connection with the Oak was foreordained to end disastrously for him.

It is not to be expected of a man such as Sir Norman is described as being, that he would be socially inclined ; and yet it is probable that his poverty was at least as much the cause of his seclusion, as was any innate aversion from, or quarrel with, his kind. Misanthropist or not, he married, when about thirty years of age, a daughter of Bishop Ferrand. The young lady might have made a more brilliant match ; Kildhurm was quoted in the matrimonial market at by no means a high figure : we are forced to the conclusion that she must have fallen in love. She was no ordinary woman. In point of mental cultivation she was her husband's equal. As regards personal appearance, her features were rather too strongly marked to fulfil the ideal of feminine beauty ; but her figure was stately and tall, her bearing dignified and graceful. She was ardently attached to her husband, and devoted herself in every way she could to his happiness and comfort. Not only did she square his worldly cash accounts for him, she assisted him also in his literary and philosophical labours ; she even—so it is hinted—aided him in certain unorthodox efforts of his to pierce through the natural veil of things, and to explore secrets which are conditionally withheld from common approach. This may mean that Sir Norman had in some degree pretended to anticipate the exploits of the future Cagliostro ; and used his lady as a passive but effective lens, to apprise him of matters which he was impotent to master by his own unfettered eyesight.

Be this as it may, there is reason for supposing that the Lady Kildhurm of this epoch was a person of exceptional temperament ; that her manifestations were not always entirely comprehensible ; that, in short, despite her cleverness, there was a screw loose in her somewhere. Sir Norman and she were not unfrequently referred to in critical social circles of the vicinity as the crazy couple—the mad Kildhurms. They bore their reputation philosophically, and were very fond of each other. A year or two after their marriage a son was born to them, and they approved themselves affectionate parents. But they were almost intolerably

poor; and when poverty amounts to an inadequacy of means to ends, it becomes irksome. It was highly desirable that their financial resources should be increased. I cannot say whether Sir Norman, in addition to his other investigations, made any search for the philosopher's stone; but there can be no doubt that he stood greatly in need of some such implement. He was angry with fortune; he conceived that wealth was his due, not on account of his station merely, but by reason of personal merit. From a state of mind such as this—from a keen perception of the injustice of fortune—it is not always a long step to attempting to force fortune's hand. The Baronet's philosophical studies may have so expanded his views as to enable him to consider the feasibility of acquiring money by means divergent from what is vulgarly called morality. He was a slight-built, nervous man, of a bilious temperament, with the features and peculiarities of his race strongly pronounced in him; but he possessed in addition—what most of his ancestors did not—a soft and winning tone of voice, and a tongue which could be persuasive when he chose to make it so. Few women could withhold their confidence from him, if he set himself to gain it: and not a few men had acknowledged the pleasant cajolery which he could employ on occasion.

Soon after the baby was born, a widowed sister of Lady Kildhurm's—Mrs. Harriet Chepstow by name—came to the Tower and took up her abode there. Mr. Chepstow, deceased, was a younger son of a wealthy family, and had obtained some share of the property; consequently, there is every reason to suppose that the widow did not eat her host's bread without paying him a fair equivalent for it. The subject is a delicate one, but it is necessary that we should touch upon it. There was nothing in the affair to cause Sir Norman any mortification. The widow needed a home, and he needed a few pounds a week; it was a fair exchange. Nevertheless, the Baronet was, in his own way, a very proud man, and it is easily conceivable that he did not enjoy the spectacle of the descendant of his forefathers enacting the rôle of a lodging-house keeper; and that his desire to find the philosopher's stone, or some equivalent for it, should grow more than ever urgent. Lady Kildhurm sympathised with him, and tried, no doubt, to quiet and console him. She liked poverty no better than he did; but she was not rebellious at heart, like him, and still less was she capable of entertaining the unorthodox views as to moral responsibility which have been above alluded to. Sir Norman felt this, and had the good sense, or the precaution, never to attempt to argue such hazardous questions with her. A man must become a very bad man indeed who does not like to see his wife more honourable and more virtuous

than he is himself. Let it not be inferred from this remark that Sir Norman had contemplated any definite criminal act. All that he had done thus far—and thousands of guiltless men have done as much—was to ask himself whether circumstances might not make some wrongs more justifiable than certain rights. At that point, or very little beyond it, he paused: circumstance and opportunity might carry the matter further, or might let it stand where it was. There was no telling.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HATFUL OF DIAMONDS.

MRS. CHEPSTOW, unlike most newly made widows, had little or nothing to say about her late husband; she was much more communicative concerning a redoubtable cousin of hers, a military gentleman, who had latterly been on service in India. Nothing had been heard of Colonel Banyon for upwards of a year, and Mrs. Chepstow began to express fears regarding his safety. She was a comfortable, round-bodied, fresh-faced woman, easily moved to tears or to laughter; and it would have been evident, even had she more striven to conceal it than she did, that if her valiant kinsman would only return home, and avail himself of his chances, he might have one of the most admirable and affectionate wives in the world. The Colonel, as she described him, was a charmingly gallant and romantic fellow, much addicted to hairbrained adventures and dashing escapades; delightfully fortunate, moreover, and at the same time contemptuous of fortune. His way through the world was always from good to better, from bright to brilliant; and since he was as generous as he was lucky, he was altogether just the sort of person one would like to be acquainted with.

'We were very fond of each other, and I don't mind saying it to you, sister,' the widow observed to Lady Kildhurm, on more than one occasion. 'We seemed to get on together so well, if you know what I mean. And I was very sad to have him go to the Indies, so soon after my husband died, too. And I remember, the day he went away, he promised he'd bring me back his hat full of diamonds.'

'A hatful of diamonds?' repeated Sir Norman, who had come into the room without being observed by Mrs. Chepstow, and had overheard her last sentence.

'Oh, Sir Norman, how you startled me! Yes, indeed, his whole hat full; and he has a good-sized head, too, I assure you.'

'How did he expect to come by the diamonds?'

'Oh, from those Indian idols, as he called 'em. He says they're covered with 'em. Idols, I suppose you know, Rebecca,' she continued, turning to Lady Kildhurm, 'I suppose you know they're a kind of magistrate they have over there: so I understood from the Colonel. And he said they sometimes had diamonds in place of eyes; but I think he was only jesting then. And he said he should loot 'em—that was one of his words he was always using—as he had the right to do, because England was at war with the Indies, and then, besides, idols are always the enemies of Christians. But I should think it would be more Christianlike for us to convert 'em than to loot 'em; and I mean to tell the Colonel so, if ever I meet him again. Heigho! poor fellow! I hope he's not dead. If he is, I should never forgive myself, for I should always be thinking it was in getting me the diamonds that he lost his life. And he was always so venturesome—and having made a promise, he would be sure to try and keep it; so I fear all the idols may have got together and killed him. And oh! I had a dream last night; I dreamt I saw him floating in the sea, over the cliff there, near the Oak, and he had a place crushed in on his head. I hope it won't come true! It isn't worth losing one's life for, Rebecca, is it?'

Lady Kildhurm, during this conversation, if conversation it could be termed, had been mending a hole in one of her little son's stockings; and the child himself was sitting on her knee, his attention divided between his own bare toes and the movement of his mother's darning-needle.

'What isn't worth losing one's life for, my dear?' she asked.

'A hatful of diamonds,' answered the widow.

'A hatful of diamonds?—No!' said Lady Kildhurm, bending to kiss her son's cheek, and thinking, perhaps, how many lives and how many diamonds into the bargain she would be ready to sacrifice for his sake.

'A hatful of diamonds?—I don't know!' murmured Sir Norman, glancing meditatively out of window, where the Oak stood dark against the afternoon sea of tender purple grey.

Presently afterwards he left the room and the Tower, and walked slowly down to the cliff. He sat himself down beneath the Oak, and, with his head thrown back, gazed up into its depths. Very gloomy it was, and very still; not a leaf stirred upon its twig. But after a long time, an acorn fell, and smote him smartly on the forehead. This broke his reverie; he rose, and laid his hand upon the ponderous bole of the tree, as upon the shoulder of a friend.

'Come, old demon!' he said, half aloud, 'I have waited long

enough : it is time something should happen. Awake, and do your best, or your worst ; the prophecy is ripe for fulfilment. "Death of three, and wealth of one !" If I be not the one, 'tis very sure I shall be of the three, and that speedily ! Come—promise me a hatful of diamonds ! or even a handful.'

The tree made no sign : it only seemed to become gloomier than ever. Sir Norman emitted a long tremulous sigh.

'It is all folly !' he said dejectedly and with bitterness. 'Why could not I go to India and win diamonds for myself ? Much good my calculations and my horoscopes and my hopes and fears have done me ! A man may rob in India and be called a hero for it : why am I in England, where robbery is hanging ? Here have I stayed, as if I were a rooted tree myself, and have gathered together the legends about this dumb old Oak, and pondered over them, and believed in them, until at last I have come verily to expect that these barren boughs shall drop gold upon me ! I will expect it no more. This is the last day that it could have happened. Old demon, thou art a liar and a block-head ! I disbelieve and abjure thee ! If ever thou didst have power, it is gone out of thee, never to return. To-morrow I will have thee hacked down, like any other timber, and piled up for use in the kitchen fire. And for my own part, I will cease to wait for the fulfilment of prophecies made by greater fools than myself ; I will begin to act, and that to some purpose !'

An abrupt, thunderous sound, prolonging itself in softer echoes, seemed to answer him from the shore. A great wave had stolen unobserved through the calm, to fling down its message at the foot of the cliff. Before the echoes had died into silence, a low and hoarse murmur began to come forth from the deepest centre, apparently, of the hitherto silent Oak. With a movement of nervous eagerness, Sir Norman again raised his head, and strove to make his glance penetrate the obscurity. The murmur grew in loudness and volume, and the heavy foliage was tumultuously agitated, and anon waved forcibly to and fro, and the branches, though as stalwart, many of them, as ordinary trees, moved and groaned and laboured, as if battling against the onset of a gale. It was an appalling spectacle—this turbulent storm roaring in the dark circumference of the Oak, while all the evening round about was still as death. Sir Norman stood there in a mood of mingled awe and exultation. He was beholding what no other living eye had beheld : what none living besides himself, perhaps, had ever dared believe in. The miracle of a century ago was true again to-day. The demon was awake once more, and was training his myriad tongues to speech. Sir Norman listened, and his ears were

filled with a sound that was, and yet was not, articulate utterance. It spoke to his thought; but then his thought laid hold of it and seemed to be itself the speaker, or at least the shaper, of the word. And when the stormy voice was at its loudest, suddenly it sank into broken whisperings and sighings, and soon was altogether hushed. The message had been given. What that message was, Sir Norman only could know.

The adventure had left him excited and tremulous, and for several minutes after he was as one overawed and distraught. By degrees, however, his mind began to recover from the first poignancy of the impression that had been made upon it; and he questioned with himself whether the occurrence had really been as miraculous as at the moment it had appeared to be?—whether his own imagination, in combination with certain natural causes, had not been answerable for at least the greater part of it? But this was only the instinctive effort of the amazed reason to deliver itself from the thraldom of the inexplicable. Further and quieter consideration showed the Baronet that he could not have been mistaken; and that there was no alternative between regarding himself as utterly insane, and acknowledging the miracle of the Oak. He preferred the latter horn of the dilemma. This night, then, was to be a momentous one for him and for his fortunes. Sir Norman issued forth from beneath the shadow of the Oak, and looked westward. It was just past sunset. He strolled across the breadth of lawn towards the Tower. On passing round to the outer gate, he was surprised to see a horse standing there, saddled and bridled, and bearing evidences of having made a long journey.

He called out to the gardener, as a bent old pauper was entitled who pottered about the grounds for a certain number of ineffective hours every day, and asked him where the horse came from. The gardener replied that a few minutes previous a gentleman had ridden up to the gate, dismounted, and having thrown his rein over the gate-post, had gone into the house. He had seemed to be in a great hurry.

‘What sort of a gentleman was he?’

‘Tall: and face brown like my hand: and he looked an active body: and his eyes were blue and merry: and he had a beard.’

‘Take the horse to the stable. I suppose there is some hay there: take off his saddle and rub him down. This must be——’

‘I am Colonel Banyon: are you Sir Norman Kildhurm? Sir, I have to ask your pardon for my lack of ceremony. Seeing no one outside, I rushed upstairs unannounced to find my cousin and kiss her hand.’

‘Colonel, my pleasure in meeting you is second only to Mrs.

Chepstow's. We have heard many things about you from her; and you have been long and anxiously expected. But may I ask where you are going——'

'Only to the stable,' said the Colonel, laughing and showing a sparkle of white teeth through his brown beard. 'I always make a point of seeing to my horse myself. And as I must resume my journey in three hours' time, it is the more needful that he should be well cared for meanwhile.' So saying, the Colonel threw the rein over his arm, and led the steed to the stable door, which the old gardener was holding open.

'Thank you, old chap,' he said to the latter; that's all I shall ask of you at present.' He put a gold piece into the man's hand, and, leaving him to stare at it in bewildered incredulity, he proceeded rapidly to unsaddle the horse and to rub him down vigorously with wisps of hay.

Sir Norman had followed him to the stable. 'Surely, Colonel,' he exclaimed in a tone of remonstrance, 'surely you don't mean to leave us again in three hours? Before that time it will be dark night, and there are signs of a storm coming on. I trust you will not hold our hospitality so cheap as to give it but a three hours' trial!'

'By no means, Sir Norman,' replied the other heartily. 'I hope to return hither a week or ten days hence, and to make a longer stay. But at present I have no choice but to make a forced march. The ship which brought me from India, you must know, was driven from its course by contrary winds, and I was landed last night at some port up here to the north, a hundred miles out of my way. I must report myself at Chester to-morrow; so you may know I have no time to lose. Luckily, my horse is one of the best in the world. But I should have been angry enough at my mishap, had I not found that it would enable me to pass Kildhurm Tower, and to catch a glimpse of my fair cousin; and to thank Lady Kildhurm and yourself for your kind care of her. Faith, she looked twice as pretty and as happy as when I bade her farewell a year and six months ago!'

'The hour of welcome better suits beauty than that of farewell,' observed Sir Norman with a smile. 'And now, Colonel, if you have made your horse as comfortable as the poor accommodation will admit, return with me to the house, and we will try to do the like by you. We have but homely country fare to set before you, but it is cordially at your service. And I think there is a bottle or two of wine in the cellar that will compensate some deficiencies.'

'I am the last man in the world to be particular about what I eat,' said the Colonel, as he and his host left the stables; 'if I were

at the table of the King of the Cannibal Islands, I should devour what was set before me with gratitude and gusto—especially if I felt as hungry as I do now! But, in fact, the pleasure of seeing my dear cousin once more—and of making the acquaintance of Lady Kildhurm and yourself—is better to me even than a meal.'

Sir Norman bowed to the compliment, and led his guest upstairs. 'In this room,' said he, opening a door, 'you can free yourself from some of the dust of travel; and meanwhile I will give orders for the other preparations. But, by the by, have you no luggage with you?'

'It has all gone round by sea,' answered the Colonel; 'all except such small matters as one may carry about his person: and except—this!' he added, 'which of course I am never parted from.'

As he spoke, he pulled from the front of his military jacket a bag made of soft yellow leather, curiously embroidered with coloured braid. It was about half as big again as a man's fist, and seemed heavy.

'And what—if the question may be permitted—is that?' inquired Sir Norman, fixing his eyes keenly on those of his guest.

'Oh, they are my diamonds, which I promised my cousin to bring her from India. But, before giving them to her, I shall take them to a lapidary in London and have them carefully set. At present, as you may see, they are many of them in the rough state, and worthless for a lady's ornaments.'

'They are not in themselves worthless, however,' remarked Sir Norman, bending over the glittering pile of jewels which the Colonel had carelessly poured out upon the table. 'And not all of them are diamonds.'

'No, they are of all kinds—rubies, sapphires, emeralds, or diamonds—I was not particular. And they have a value of their own, as you say: a fellow who understands about such things once offered me a hundred thousand guineas for the lot. But, of course, it was not his money that I wanted: each of those stones has some adventure associated with it which no money could buy of me; and, besides, they are all destined to adorn the person of my pretty cousin.'

'A magnificent gift, indeed!' murmured Sir Norman.

'I hope she will like it,' replied the Colonel ingenuously.

'What woman—what human being, for that matter—could be indifferent to it!' sighed Sir Norman, turning away. 'Well, I will leave you for the moment; when you are prepared, come to the room where you first found Mrs. Chepstow. We shall await you with impatience.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE GUEST.

If Colonel Banyon's visit was brief, it was merry: it was filled from end to end with laughter, talk, and story. The Colonel had, naturally, a thousand anecdotes to tell, and a still greater number of questions to answer. Though a hero, he was neither a reticent nor a shamefaced one. He enjoyed what he was heartily. He had lived a successful, daring, reckless, honourable life, and was accustomed to look back over the past and forward to the future with equal satisfaction and cheerfulness. He gave a very vivid and entertaining picture of his recent Indian experiences, and when, at length, he declared that it was time for him to be off, Mrs. Chepstow could not conceal her chagrin: her pretty under-lip trembled, and tears stood in her eyes.

' You will be back soon, cousin? ' she said piteously.

' In ten days, if I live so long,' he declared.

' Live ten days! What do you mean? '

' Nothing, upon my soul! ' laughed the Colonel. ' They say, though, that when folks have been so merry as we have been this evening, calamity is nigh. And since I have been the merriest, it would be fair to infer that it's to me the calamity is highest.'

' Don't talk so! you make me shudder! ' exclaimed Mrs. Chepstow, hiding her face in her hands. ' And last night I dreamt I saw you dead! '

' Well, if I die, it will be my own fault,' returned the Colonel, still with the sparkle of laughter in his blue eyes.

' You ride armed, I trust,' put in Sir Norman. ' With such a treasure beneath your jacket, you should make your account for a highwayman or two.'

' I always keep one or two of these fellows about me,' said the other, showing the butt of a small pistol. ' Not that I should think of shooting a highwayman; poor devils, they have a hard enough time of it without that! No, I keep my pistols in case of accidents; and accidents are what never happen in civilised countries.'

' May none happen to you, at all events! ' said Lady Kildhurm kindly.

' Thanks, noble lady,' replied the warrior, kissing her hand. ' Thanks and farewell! Farewell, my dearest cousin. You shall have the jewels back again as soon as the deftest of lapidaries can

get them in order for you. Farewell, Sir Norman: my best acknowledgments for your hospitality.'

'Our parting shall not be yet,' said Sir Norman. 'I will saddle my mare and ride beside you for a mile or two. The road you must travel skirts the cliff, and in parts is dangerous to an unfamiliar tread, especially at nightfall. After seeing you safely past those treacherous spots, I can leave you with a better conscience.'

'I shall be heartily glad of your companionship, I need not say,' was the Colonel's answer. 'As to cliffs, however, I am not unaccustomed to them.'

He again took leave of the ladies, and followed Sir Norman down the stairs, and across the courtyard to the stables; where each man led out and saddled his own horse. The old gardener always made a point of retiring to his quarters at sunset.

'That storm you spoke of still holds off,' remarked the Colonel.

'It will overtake us before daylight,' answered the Baronet.

'Sir Norman, did you ever see a man struck by lightning?'

'Never.'

'I saw it once, at sea. I don't know why I happened to think of it at this moment. There isn't lightning enough in all England, at this time of year, to kill me. There I go again, hinting at my own death! That sweet cousin of mine seems to have put foolish notions into my head. However, if anything is to happen to me, I have taken care that she shall lose nothing by it. My will is made, signed, and sealed, and both the jewels and all other wealth that I have got go to her.'

'Let us hope you may find a better way of endowing her with your worldly goods than by bequeathing them to her,' said Sir Norman, smiling.

'It lies with her, and I think she likes me,' returned the Colonel, twisting his moustachios. 'But though I'm little enough afraid of most things, and by no means as blind as a mole either, I'm blessed if I dare to ask her whether she'll marry me, because I can't see quite clearly enough into her heart. However, all in good time! Perhaps the glitter of the gems may serve to throw some light upon the question.'

Sir Norman nodded, but he made no reply.

They were now riding along a narrow and rocky road, within sight of the sea, and following the line of the coast southward. There was as yet no wind, but the waves were breaking with a hollow, rhythmical sound along the shore, telling of some tornado a hundred miles away. There was no moon, and the sky was in

great part overcast with clouds, so that the darkness was considerable. The riders could see no more of each other than their black outlines, as they rode along side by side. At the distance of about a mile from Kildhurm Tower, the coast began to rise; and the road, instead of skirting the inland base of this eminence, climbed up with it, and, moreover, approached so near the verge that, in some places, it actually infringed upon it. The Colonel's military eye did not fail to take note of this peculiarity.

'I have a better opinion of the legs of the fellows who built this road than of their brains,' he observed. 'Did they think it was shorter to climb up a precipice than to go round it?'

'There were two reasons why the road was made in this way,' replied the Baronet. 'First, there is a deep morass across the inland route, which is beyond the skill of our local engineers either to bridge over or to fill up. Secondly, there existed, at the time the road was planned, a convent at the highest point of the cliff; and it was deemed advisable, in that religious age, that the way of the world should run as near as possible to the convent door. We shall come to the ruins of the convent very soon: and there, or thereabouts, I shall take leave of you.'

The horses scrambled up the steep ascent, Sir Norman leading the way; and it was not until they had reached the summit that he spoke again.

'Are you a religious man, Colonel Banyon?' he abruptly asked.

The Colonel turned a surprised glance at him. 'I believe in my Saviour, and pray to Him when I get a chance and a prayer comes into my head,' he replied.

'If a man were about to die, I have thought that no place could be more fitting than this from which to take a last look at the world; and from which to offer up a last prayer to heaven, if he were that way minded.'

'I will remember your suggestion when my final hour approaches; and if I'm in this neighbourhood, perhaps I may avail myself of it. The spot has one recommendation—that if, after all, Death made his approach too slowly, you would need to take not more than a single step to find yourself in his arms.'

'Yes, it is two hundred feet to the bottom, and barely three feet to the brink!' said the Baronet. 'Death hovers within arm's length of us as we ride.'

'He has been nearer to me than that, and yet I have snapped my fingers at him,' returned the Colonel, laughing. 'Well, I must be on my way again.'

'Let me lead your horse over this dangerous pass,' said Sir

Norman; dismounting from his own horse and seizing the Colonel's bridle. 'And then, farewell indeed!'

'Have a care! What are you about?' cried Colonel Banyon, after a moment.

'Farewell!' repeated the other; and with all his strength he forced the Colonel's horse backwards to the edge of the cliff. The rider saw and perhaps comprehended the danger. He had not time to dismount; he drew his pistol, and at the same time drove his spurs into the horse's sides. The horse reared and strove to plunge forward, but it was too late. His hind hoofs trod upon the crumbling verge of the precipice. There was a cry, a flash and a report, and a scent of burnt powder on the night air, which Sir Norman breathed alone.

CHAPTER X.

A BURIED SECRET.

SIR NORMAN stood on the brink of the cliff, and listened. There was not much to hear—no more remarkable sound than might be caused by the fall of a loose boulder, and the murmur of the surf partly disguised even that. The tide was rising, in another half hour it would be dashing against the base of the precipice.

The Baronet took his mare by the headstall, and began to lead her back down the steep road which he had so lately climbed in company with Colonel Banyon. His mood of mind was much more composed and lucid now than it had been then. While the deed which he was to commit was as yet in the future he had been full of agitation and doubt; and it had seemed to him quite as likely that he would, when it came to the point, himself take the fatal leap, as compel the Colonel to do so. But now, since doubt was necessarily at an end, so likewise was agitation. Sir Norman had a single plain fact to deal with, not an indefinite number of vague and dangerous possibilities. He saw his proper course in the circumstances as clearly as if he had planned it all out beforehand; and he lost no time in following it.

Having arrived at the lowest dip of the road, he secured his horse to the branch of a dead tree, clambered down to the shore, and began to make his way as rapidly as he could towards that spot where he knew the body of Colonel Banyon must be lying. With an active step and a heedful eye he hurried over the broken débris of the beach, and presently came to that part which lies immediately beneath the loftiest altitude of the cliff.

It was not easy to distinguish the horse and man where they

lay in the darkness, and anybody who had not been on the look-out for them might easily have passed them by in the belief that they were nothing more than a heap of sea-drift. But Sir Norman was under no such delusion. When he caught sight of them—it was the whiteness of the Colonel's upturned face that first arrested his glance—he approached cautiously, with ears alert to detect whatever whispered groan there might still remain to hear. But there was nothing; the agony had not been prolonged, and it was over. Colonel Banyon and his horse were both quite dead. Sir Norman had certainly anticipated nothing else, and yet the visibility of the fact gave him a start. Colonel Banyon had been so very much alive a few minutes before, and now he was so very lifeless! The handsome, gallant, dashing officer, who had been so overflowing with hopes and projects, and love and laughter, was now suddenly become inert and devoid alike of thought and passion, good or evil. It was so impressive that it affected Sir Norman almost like something theatrical. The Colonel appeared to him, for a moment, to be acting a part. When the curtain came down, he would get up, like Mr. Betterton in '*Hamlet*,' and come out and make his bow before the audience. But unfortunately there is no curtain in these cases, and the poor actor, having died with what realism he can command, is obliged to remain dead indefinitely.

The surf, now breaking near at hand, reminded Sir Norman that he also had a part to enact. Not that he had been altogether idle since leaving Kildhurm Tower; but he had accomplished only the preliminary portion of the work which he had resolved to perform. In looking forward to this night's occupations, he might have been led to suppose that the murder would be more difficult to an unpractised hand than the robbery; but experience proved that the truth was just the other way. To hurl his victim over the cliff had been an excitement—fierce, and, in a certain sense, pleasurable. But this despoiling the corpse in cold blood afterwards was neither pleasant nor exciting; and yet it had to be done, else all the benefit of the murder would be thrown away. To kill, moreover, was aristocratic; Sir Norman's ancestors had won renown by doing no more than he had just done; but to pick a pocket was plebeian, and none of his ancestors, so far as he was aware, had ever been guilty of that. But again, there was no escape from it—or only one escape! Sir Norman might, if he chose, return to his horse, mount him, ride him up the cliff, and leap him over the verge to a resting-place here beside the Colonel. By this means, and by this only, could he avoid the logical necessity of pocket-picking, and at the same time conceal, and perhaps in

some measure expiate, the crime already committed. Sir Norman thought of all this, and weighed the question for a moment in his mind. Should he go on, or should he turn back? He decided to go on: and, stooping over the body of his late guest, he drew the purse of embroidered leather from its hiding-place, thrust it into his own pocket, and turned away. He had got a fortune, according to the promise of destiny; but if it had been larger than it was, he already felt that he had paid a fair equivalent for it. As he stumbled back along the dark shore, he was glad of the darkness, and inclined to wish that daylight might altogether cease from the earth. It was a wish characteristic of a fresh-born criminal. By-and-by he would learn how to make his own face answer all the purposes of darkness, so far as the concealment of what was within was concerned. In one way or another, however, darkness must be his category from this time forth. He was a creature of the night, and would for ever remain such.

'I do not intend to excuse my act,' said Sir Norman to himself, when he had once more attained the road and resumed his saddle. 'But if I admit the sin of it, I have a right also to take account of its uses. I have deliberately and treacherously murdered the man who was my guest; I have murdered him from no feeling of hatred or anger, but solely for my pecuniary advantage. That is the worst there is to be said, and I admit that it is damnable. But now for the other side! I have restored the fortunes of my family. I have given comfort to my wife, prosperity to my son, and power to myself. I shall have caused my sister Chepstow to shed a few tears, perhaps, when she learns (if she ever does learn it) that her dream about her dead lover has come true; but in a week or a month her eyes will be dried by some other suitor, and meanwhile she will receive, as compensation for the loss of the jewels, all the fortune in ready money which her cousin bequeathed to her in his will. That, certainly, cannot be considered an injury. As to Colonel Banyon himself, I could not have killed him had not his hour been fully come; and therefore he can have no more quarrel with me than with any other instrument which fate might have chosen to employ. Nor have I harmed society or the state: for the murder which is not known to be a murder becomes a simple death, which can neither outrage the law nor corrupt the morals of the people. I conclude, then, that no person or thing has been wronged or injured by my act, except myself: and I have even benefited others at the sacrifice of my own moral welfare and repose. And finally, since I have been my own accuser, let me also be my own judge!'

At this point of Sir Norman's soliloquy, the storm which had

been all night brewing suddenly came into noisy and violent existence. Buffeted by the wind and pelted by the rain, the Baronet was distracted from his casuistical and metaphysical vein, and his meditations took a more outward and material turn.

'No one can have seen these gems besides ourselves,' he thought; 'but yet there is danger to be feared from those which are uncut. Perhaps I may find it safest to dispose of them abroad. Meanwhile, I can put them where they will be as secure as death itself: and might remain so for a hundred years if necessary. It will be best, at all events, to take no further step in the business until the Colonel's death has been discovered, and his property administered. The gems, no doubt, are mentioned in the will; inquiry will be made for them; and it will be known that the Colonel was last seen alive under our roof. And what after that? Why, then, I rode forth with him, to set him on his way: and it was known to me that he carried the gems upon his person. Yes, and I had spoken warningly to him of the peril which menaced a lonely traveller, so richly laden, in these parts: the women will bear witness to that. But then it will be asked: "How far did you ride with him? and which way was he heading when you saw him last?" What shall be my answer? Shall I say, "I left him at the rise of the convent cliff, and know no more of him?" Why not rather tell the truth up even to the last moment? Why not tell the truth and nothing but the truth, and only not the whole truth?—which, indeed, finite man can never tell. Why not say, "I rode with him to the top of the cliff, my hand on his bridle; but there, in the darkness, his horse took fright, and reared, and fell backwards: and I, unless I would have been dragged over also, was fain to loose my hold of the bridle, and let them go. Then I went down to the shore to search, but . . . well, but the tide had risen, and the storm had come on, and it was impossible to reach the bodies." That would be better than downright vulgar perjury: more decent, and perhaps more prudent likewise. Stay, though! if I take this stand, it must be taken at once! I must burst into the room, heated, dishevelled, distraught, and gasp out my story with horror in my voice! Am I actor enough for that? I fear not! And who knows but another sort of horror might find its way into my tones or eyes, and betray me! No, I cannot venture it. As yet, I have looked on no living human face since I saw his vanish over the cliff, lit up for an instant by the flash of his pistol. Perhaps—who knows?—I shall blanch and turn pale under the glance of the first questioning eyes I meet. I know the man I have been heretofore, but I do not yet know the man I am now. Perhaps I am a coward, or an idiot; or a

madman. What wonder if I were, after such a night's work ! Was ever a night so black, or a storm so boisterous ! All the witches in hell might be abroad : and I among the rest ! Am I a witch then ? Who knows ? The country folks have long believed no better of me ; and perhaps to-night's work will bring about an encounter between his Satanic majesty and me, and a signing of the Book ! Where shall the meeting be held ? Where but beneath Kildhurm's Oak, where all the mischief was hatched from the beginning ! Forward, mare ! Why do we lag here in the rain, when company is awaiting us at home ? Forward !'

Goaded by whip and spur, the mare put herself to her best speed, and before many minutes Sir Norman knew, less by any visible sign than by the direction and inclination of the road, that the Tower was near. He drew rein, and paused for a moment. Should he take his mare to the stable now, or—afterwards ? He resolved on the latter course. Keeping as much as possible on the turf, and feeling rather than seeing his way, he pressed cautiously forward, until he found himself almost beneath the branches of the Oak. There he dismounted.

The din of the tempest was bewildering. The waves came thundering against the shore with such headlong power that a tremor of the earth was perceptible every time they struck. There was a fury of white foam beneath the rocky, overhanging parapet, on which the Oak stood, and this whiteness extended far out, until the blackness of the night prevailed over it. Occasionally sounds like moaning and sighing seemed to come from the mid-tumult of the sea, as if some huge creature were complaining there : and the driving spray and the rain assumed strange, drifting forms, like disembodied spirits hurtling through the air. But, terrible as was the sea, the Oak was more terrible still. It fought the wild wind with its great arms like a mad creature. Its cumbersome foliage flapped and hissed through the wet gale like the matted locks of a wrestling giant. Its whole vast frame rocked to and fro, as if it were about to tear itself up from its rooted place, and go forth to meet and struggle with the storm. And from the grinding together of the mighty boughs were generated shrieks and human-like outcries and noises like weeping and like mocking laughter : as though a knot of evil spirits were tearing each other to pieces in the central darkness of the tree ; or were they combining to torture and torment some newly-captured human soul ? Dimly, meanwhile, through the murky obscurity, glowed three red squares of light from the Tower, where Lady Kildhurm and her sister waited for Sir Norman's return. The Baronet saw the light, and a vision of the two innocent and loving women rose before his

mind ; and of the infant boy, lulled asleep in his crib by the muffled voices of the gale. All that was as a foreign country to him now ; all the more alien because it had been so intimately his own. He turned his back upon it, and fixed his regard upon the haunted Oak. He stepped beneath the wide spread of the labouring branches ; then, with a leap from the ground, he caught the lowest of these between his arms, and in another moment had swung himself up into the heart of the tree, and out of sight of earth and sky.

‘ He has been gone more than two hours,’ said Lady Kildhurm, breaking silence at last.

‘ I do heartily pray nothing has happened to him—it is dreadful to think how wet he will get in this rain, poor fellow ; and he must be in Chester to-morrow, he said. I wish he had spent the night here.’

‘ And so do I ; but it was of my husband that I spoke.’

‘ Oh, Sir Norman knows his way about ! wasn’t he born and bred here ? No fear but he will find his way home safe enough.’

‘ But he should have been away half an hour at most : and now—see ! it is close upon midnight. I fear something has gone wrong.’

‘ It is the rain that keeps him. He has taken shelter somewhere, and will bide his time till the worst of it is over. But my poor cousin—what will become of him ! Heigho ! I felt, when I said good-bye to him, as if ’twas for ever.’

Lady Kildhurm laid down the sewing with which she had been occupying herself, and clasping her hands on her knee, sat gazing out on the black and rain-smitten window-pane. Suddenly she said :

‘ This is his evil day. I had forgotten it. Oh, my heart !’

‘ His evil day, sister ? What do you mean ?’

‘ Yes ; he showed me it once in his horoscope. The evil and the good came side by side, but the evil was the stronger. He should not have gone out ; to-night of all nights I should have kept him ! Oh, Norman—my husband, come back to me !’

‘ La, sister, how you talk ! you make me shudder. As for horoscopes, I’m sure no Christian ought to believe in them.’

‘ I feel as if he were near me !’ exclaimed Lady Kildhurm, rising from her chair and moving about the room uneasily. ‘ He is near me, somewhere, and yet I am not happy : I cannot breathe freely, and there is pain in my heart.’

‘ La ! sister, indeed you frighten me. Pray sit down again, and do not stare about so ! do you think to see him through a stone wall ?’

'He is near me—and it is not well with him. He is looking towards me—now—can you not see his face at the window?'

'His face at the window! Pray remember, my dear, that the window is fifty feet from the ground, and—'

'No, there is no face there. It was a flake of foam, maybe. But I could not bear to lose him; I could not bear it!'

'You are working yourself into such a state of mind, my dear, that very soon I shall be more anxious about you than I am about him. As for not being able to bear things, you never know what you can bear till you try. I have borne the loss of my husband, and a great many worse things. One can bear almost anything, I believe. Because, if the thing to be borne comes, what else can you do?'

'I could not bear it!' repeated Lady Kildhurm feverishly. She moved again to the window, and peered out for a few moments into the darkness.

'Depend upon it,' said Mrs. Chepstow, with a confidence of tone that was not altogether warranted by her interior sentiments, 'depend upon it, my dear, your husband has stepped into one of the peasant's huts out of the rain, and is at this very instant swallowing a draught of hot ale, with a pipe of tobacco in his other hand. How he will laugh when I tell him how you have——'

'Hark!'

'Merciful heavens! what is it?'

Quick as thought, Lady Kildhurm had unfastened the catch of the lattice, and the wind, violently driving it open, burst head long into the room, put out the candles, and went roaring through the house, slamming doors, flapping curtains, and shaking soot down the chimneys. None of this disturbance, however, had been noticed by the two women. Their ears had been filled and their hearts stopped by the sound of three frantic screams, following rapidly one upon another, and rising high above the confusion of the tempest. They were the screams of a man in mortal agony and horror. Both the women had known at once whose voice it was, though they had never heard it pitched in that key before. But what could have happened to him? The screams were not repeated. The women exchanged a ghastly look.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

(To be concluded.)

Kildhurm's Oak.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEVIL'S GRIP.

'Let us go together,' said Mrs. Chepstow at last, in a shaking voice.

'No,' replied her sister decisively. 'Do you stay here and guard my son. I must go to meet them yonder alone.'

'Them! who are they? Do you think my cousin is there too?'

'Satan and his imps are there. Hush! you must not question me. If they have taken him, they must take me also—unless I can win him back! That is the question, for I cannot bear to lose him. Either he must return to me, or I will follow him: I cannot live apart from him. Hush! Do you stay by the child; and on your life, do not come near the Oak till after sunrise.'

While Lady Kildhurm had been speaking in this strange fashion, she was making her preparations to go forth, and the only provision against the storm and its portents which she took with her consisted of a small Bible, which she put in her bosom, and a cross of carved ivory, which she hung at her girdle. Thus equipped, and wearing still the embroidered satin gown which she had put on that evening in honour of their guest, she went out, and the darkness closed upon her. Mrs. Chepstow crept fearfully to the child's crib, and knelt down there; and crying, praying, and dropping asleep by turns, she passed the long hours of that memorable night.

But Lady Kildhurm, on issuing from the gate, made straight for the Oak. As she approached it, a kind of phosphorescent gleam seemed to hover about the branches, such as sailors sometimes behold on the yardarms of their vessel in bad weather. The gale, however, had suddenly fallen almost calm; and though drops of rain fell occasionally, it was evident that the storm had raged itself out. The sea tossed its waves upwards aimlessly, as if forgetting whither to drive them, and therefore appealing to the clouds. A sense of exhaustion and heaviness seemed to pervade Nature, as if she had aroused herself to do some hideous deed, and now, the deed being done, were awaiting shudderingly what should follow.

The woman paused just outside the circle of the Oak's boughs, and sent her glance resolutely into the obscurity underneath. After a few moments' scrutiny, she took the ivory cross between her hands, and went forward. The phosphorescent gleams, wavering to and fro, illuminated duskily the figure of a man stretched out near the base of the trunk. Lady Kildhurm crouched down beside him and spoke close to his ear :

' Norman, thy wife is with thee.'

The man emitted a stertorous breath, but uttered no word.

' Norman, thou art dying. Tell me, how is it with thy soul ? for whither thou goest thy wife shall follow thee. If it is well with thee, kiss this cross for a sign. See, I hold it to thy lips.'

But the man's lips did not move.

' Has the Evil One overcome thee, then ? ' said the woman sadly, after a pause. ' But take comfort, my beloved, for I will not desert thee. We have seen and known many marvellous things, Norman—thou and I together : and I have never shrunk from going along with thee, hand in hand, wherever thou didst lead the way. And now, my love shall go with thee across the grave ; I will not seek a happiness where thou art not ; and in proof of it, my husband, if thou biddest me to fling the cross into the sea, and to tear the leaves from the Holy Book and cast them on the air, I will do it ! Only move thy hand in answer, and it shall be enough.'

For a long time, as it seemed, the man lay wholly motionless ; his life, which had hung trembling on the balance, appeared quite to have slipped away. A great fear bestirred itself in Lady Kildhurm's soul : if her husband died, and made no sign as to whither he had gone, how should she follow him ? Under the influence of this dread, she placed her lips to his ear, and spoke sharply and urgently :

' Norman—my husband,' she cried ; ' come back ! Tell me what I am to do ! '

A tremor passed through the man's body. Slowly and stiffly he raised himself on one arm, and raising the other hand, he pointed upwards.

' There ! ' he muttered, in a sluggish but articulate tone ; ' there is treasure ! seek for it ! '

For a moment after saying these words, he maintained his position : one hand pointing upwards, while his face, on whose features death was visible, bent heavily towards the earth. Then, stiffly, he sank back ; his wife received his head in her lap. He was already dead : and, indeed, his spirit seemed to have returned to its human clay, in obedience to the wife's summons, only to utter

those ambiguous sentences, and then to finally depart. But, ambiguous or not, they had answered their purpose; they had planted hope, like a seed, in the very midst of the bereaved woman's despair. He had spoken to her of a treasure above—a treasure in Heaven; and had bade her seek it there. But if he knew of a treasure in Heaven, it must needs be a treasure which he himself had laid up there: and thither, consequently, he must himself have gone. So reasoned Lady Kildhurm; and she forbore to fling away her cross, or scatter the leaves of the Holy Book to the winds. In her shaken and now distempered mind, she beheld a vision of a long vigil of prayer and sanctity, and at the end a death which would be blessed, because it would unite her once more to him. She drew the lifeless body to the foot of the Oak, and seated there, resting against the weather-blackened bole, she waited for the morning.

The morning dawned early and pure, with a sky like banks of wild roses and primroses, and breezes cool and sweet breathing from them. The facile sea translated these fragrant glories into deeper-toned but scarce less enchanting beauty; and the earth sparkled with freshness. But Kildhurm's Oak, standing in the midst of so much loveliness, did not mingle with it, but rather seemed to hold darkly and grimly aloof from it, as if conscious of a spirit altogether at variance with the gentler influences of creation. It stretched its branches above the group of lifeless and living humanity huddled beneath it, with an air of sardonic protection. 'Behold my handiwork!' it appeared to say, 'and sweeten it with the graces of the morning if you can!' When Mrs. Chepstow and the old gardener and the boy, Philip, first came upon the two, they thought that both were dead. But as they drew near, they perceived that the woman's eyes were open and seeing, though there was a wild and unsettled expression in them. Nor did she answer when her sister or the old man addressed her; she only whispered to herself, and then bent over and whispered again in the dead man's ear, and smiled. But when her little son Philip spoke to her in his childish tones, some vestige of motherly memories glimmered in her haggard face; and presently she beckoned him to her.

'There, my son!' she said in solemn tones, pointing upwards with her finger; 'there is treasure! seek for it!'

'Where, mamma?' demanded the little fellow. 'In the Oak?' Lady Kildhurm smiled drearily, and relapsed into silence.

A stretcher was brought, and the body of Sir Norman was carried back to the Tower. The manner of his death was a mystery, and one which was not for many years fully explained. His mare,

still saddled and bridled, was found in her stable, whither she had evidently made her way after the catastrophe to her rider had happened. But of what nature had been that catastrophe? It was found, upon examination, that the Baronet's neck had been dislocated, which of course amply accounted for the fact of his death, though not for anything beyond that. Some opined that his horse must have taken fright during the storm, and rushing beneath the Oak had either thrown the Baronet there, or he had been swept off his saddle by a branch of the tree. This latter hypothesis seemed plausible enough, though there were still those three terrible screams left uninterpreted. The screams, however, might have been comfortably ignored, had it not been for a certain appalling sign of violence which had been left upon the person of the dead man himself, and the significance of which, if it could not be fathomed, it was equally impossible to do away with. The right hand, from the wrist to the finger-ends, was stripped of the skin, and in parts even of the flesh; the bone of the thumb was crushed, and the wrist was wrenched out of joint. These indications—so far as the awe-stricken senses of the beholders were able to apprehend them—seemed to show that the Baronet's hand must have been caught in a grasp of superhuman strength; and that in tearing it free with the energy of desperation, he had left part of its substance behind. Whose hand, then, had gripped his own so hard? and for what purpose? Any answer to such questions must evidently be purely conjectural. It was indeed a grisly problem to ponder over, and one which nervous people would rather discuss with cronies in broad daylight than with their own minds in the small hours of the night. Especially would this be the case after certain wiseacres had intimated their opinion that the marks left upon Sir Norman's hand had been made by no other talons than those of his Satanic majesty; who must have been strangely impressed with the idea that the Baronet was his property—if firmness of grasp is to be taken as any criterion of conviction of ownership. On the other hand, it was to be said in the Baronet's favour that he had, after all, succeeded in wrenching himself loose; but since a rough comparison of times proved that he must have died a few minutes after this escape, the doubt suggested itself whether, in his disembodied state, Satan might not have proved too strong for him. Might it not be, in fact, that although the fleshly hand had been freed, the spiritual one had remained in the Arch-Enemy's gripe? Three screams of horror and agony had been heard, but not so much as a single shout of triumph and victory. Upon the whole, therefore, the preponderance of contemporary opinion went rather against poor

Sir Norman, though it was admitted by every one that it was never safe to dogmatise about an occurrence of this kind. Besides, the man was dead ; and dead people, even when they have lived under the suspicion of being wizards, had better not be abused. Sir Norman, accordingly, was buried with the ceremonies of His Majesty's most Christian Church. On opening his will, in which the few possessions he owned were bequeathed to his wife in trust for their son, it was observed that particular mention was made of a signet ring ; but the ring was nowhere to be found. Mrs. Chepstow, however, being interrogated, declared that the Baronet had always been in the habit of wearing this ring on the fourth finger of his right hand ; and that she had noticed it there on the last occasion of her seeing him alive. This evidence made it clear that whoever had squeezed the Baronet's hand so tightly was, in all likelihood, the present wearer of the signet ring. For the rest, the evidence was not of much practical value—unless it should aid some time in the identification of the other party to this mysterious and grisly encounter.

About the time that the mortal remains of Sir Norman were safely laid in their last resting-place, the drowned corpse of Colonel Banyon was discovered by a fisherman some distance down the coast. It was plain from the condition of the body—many of the bones on the left side had been broken—that the Colonel must have fallen from a great height ; and the subsequent discovery of his horse, in a similar shattered state, helped the coroner in coming to the conclusion that the deceased must have ridden over the cliffs during the late storm. There was no trace of the leather bag of jewels which the Colonel was reported to have had with him ; but his garments had become so much torn and loosened by the action of the waves and the attacks of fishes, that this was not surprising. The gems, if they were anywhere, must be at the bottom of the bay ; such was the coroner's verdict upon this point ; and it had so much weight with the fishermen's boys along the coast, that for many years thereafter, squads of them might be seen every day at low tide, groping amidst the sands and seaweeds for precious stones. But not so much as a single diamond, emerald, or ruby ever rewarded these industrious searchers.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIBYL.

LADY KILDHURM, if she could not properly be called insane, was none the less in a very abnormal mental state. The attitude of her mind, indeed, might be considered almost the reverse of that

usual to mortals: for to her the material world appeared visionary and unstable, and the objects of her inner life were her only realities. Being thus removed from sympathy with her fellow-creatures, she necessarily occupied a place apart, where she commanded the respect, and sometimes the awe, of those who came into contact with her, but never their comprehension. Always a striking-looking woman, her appearance was now invested with a solemn majesty, to which the shadow of the tragedy with which she had been connected no doubt lent impressiveness. By degrees she adopted certain peculiarities of costume and demeanour, and fell into various eccentricities of speech and conduct, all of which tended to confirm the country folks of the neighbourhood in the opinion that the Lady of Kildhurm was a species of wise-woman, or sibyl, acquainted with supernatural lore, and able to give them a good harvest or a bad rheumatism according as her whim might be. Of course, when a delusion of this kind once gets a footing in the popular mind, nothing can occur, either good or bad, which will not be cited in support of it. Fortunately for Lady Kildhurm, it was generally agreed that her salutary outweighed her hostile influence. Mothers brought their sick children to her to touch, as if she had been a monarch; and fathers sought her advice on questions of business, and shaped her vague and wandering utterances into profoundly pertinent replies. Thus, without being necessarily aware of it, the poor lady created around her a voluntary host of feudal retainers, quite as loyal as those which the former lords of Kildhurm had lost, and much more willing and unstinting in the matter of supplies of provisions, and of tributary hay and corn. Thus it happened that the domestic economy of Kildhurm Tower had not, for many years past, been in so prosperous a condition as it was now. The curse which seemed to have been darkening over the place for several successive generations, had now begun to lift and lighten, as if it had done its worst. Mrs. Chepstow also remained at the Tower, and practically had the entire charge of the household and of the education of young Sir Philip, and had moreover contributed to this better state of things by making over to the heir the whole of the fortune which Colonel Banyon had bequeathed to her; reserving to herself, until the boy came of age, the right of spending the income of this estate for the common benefit of the family. It will be seen, therefore, that, leaving out the fact that the lord of the Tower had died a violent and mysterious death, and that his wife had lost her reason in consequence, Kildhurm had not much more cause to complain of its destiny than have other ancient and partially decayed families.

The Oak, meanwhile, had by no means ceased to connect itself with the family interests, although it, also, seemed to have become less menacing since its last terrible manifestation. Its present relation to the household was more intimate and friendly than had ever been the case before ; it had, in fact, become the haunt and almost the home of Lady Kildhurm herself. It was her daily and often also her nightly habit to climb into its branches, and there sit for hours, gazing out on the sea and singing to herself fragments of songs ; or occasionally carrying on what had the semblance of being long and earnest conversations with some interlocutor who never made himself visible to any other eyes than those of her ladyship, and who was probably only subjectively manifest even to her. Be that as it may, this unseen personage's existence was solidly believed in by many intelligent persons, several of whom went so far as to say that they had heard the tones of his voice. Others affirmed that he could be no other than the genie himself of the Oak, who, having made away with Lady Kildhurm's husband on account of some slight which the latter put upon him, was now making amends to the wife by taking her into his confidence, and imparting to her many invaluable family secrets, as well as giving her instructions as to the future. Among other things, he must have explained to her the true meaning of the prophetic verses inscribed upon the silver disc, which was at this period almost entirely embedded in the substance of the bark : and she must therefore be aware of the nature of the fortune which was in store for the Kildhurm race, and of the means by which it was to be acquired. But the more things she was credited with knowing, the less inclined did she seem to satisfy the curiosity of the ignorant ; insomuch that not one well-authenticated word of all the tales that the genie of the Oak was said to have poured into her ear has ever transpired from that day to this.

I am far from supposing, on the other hand, that Lady Kildhurm was above sharing the persuasions of these unenlightened people as to the extent of her own enlightenment, or, perhaps, as to the channels through which it was obtained. Persons in her peculiar condition are not apt to be lacking in self-appreciation, and easily adopt any theory concerning themselves which seems to give them the distinction appertaining to supernatural pretensions. It is highly probable that the widow of Sir Norman believed that she held communion with beings of another world or plane of existence, and that she was happy in that belief. It is certain that she regarded herself as in a manner a sacred personage, and that she attributed the highest importance to all her acts and utterances, no matter how meaningless these might appear to the

uninitiated observer. She commonly spoke of the Oak as ‘My Friend,’ or ‘My Counsellor,’ and was careful to observe certain ceremonies and formalities before ascending into the seclusion of the branches : such as kneeling at the foot of the trunk and touching her forehead to the bark, and tracing a circle round about the base of the tree with her ivory cross. A few rude foot-rests had been made, by means of which she could ascend to her retreat with ease ; and in the angle of the boughs she had constructed for herself a sort of seat, which she called her throne. Here, no doubt, the pleasantest hours of her weird and lonely existence were passed. Here she gathered in the harvest of her wisdom, and from hence she gave it forth. The sinister Oak, which had been the hostile tyrant of the Kildhurm race for more than a hundred and fifty years, was become this forlorn woman’s most intimate and inexhaustible companion. On summer days the branches which supported her swayed soothingly, and the broad leaves whispered in a murmurous undertone ; while glimpses of yellow sunshine strayed here and there through the interstices of the foliage ; or, perhaps, a shower pattered harmlessly on the living roof overhead. From below came up the endless prattle of the musical ocean, and the sparkle of its breezy blue. What wonder if, at such moments, she heard voices that do not speak to mortal ears, or beheld visions whereof the outward eye can take no note ? But when the great equinoctial gales were let loose, and came shrieking down upon the astonished coast, then did the sibyl and her Oak strike a wilder and more interior chord of harmony. The Oak breathed forth its deep organ-tones of power and defiance, while the sibyl loudly chanted a thrilling treble, that often rang out above the other noises of the natural symphony, and caused passing travellers to start and stare, and, if the night were already fallen, to hasten their steps and wish themselves safe at home. After such a bout, the prophetess would descend from her perch with flashing eye and exalted mien, as if instinct with the divine fury of the seers of old ; and occasionally, after an exceptionally boisterous gale, she would appear with a cluster of acorns or a branch of leaves in her bosom or amongst her hair, and she was more careful of these adornments and more proud of them than if they had been gold and precious stones. ‘They are my friend’s gift,’ she would say ; ‘and the token of his confidence and favour.’

But this fantastic behaviour was, for the most part, confined to her hours of actual association with the Oak ; at such times as she was within doors, her bearing was gentle and undemonstrative, her look passive and vacant, and she spoke but little, and that feebly and vaguely. She was less observant, as a rule, of sights than of sounds ; she always seemed to recognise the voice of Philip, and to be aware of the bond that united him to her : and she was fond of

walking about with his hand clasped in hers, or with her arm resting upon his shoulder, when he had grown bigger. She was never weary of listening to his childish and boyish talk, and he, for his part, was never more pleased with himself and with things in general than when he was pouring out to her the riches of his small mind—appealing to her at the end of every sentence or two for sympathy or approval, which she never failed to accord with a smile, or a movement of the head or hand, or a murmured word. And sometimes—but this very rarely—she would in turn talk to him, in a low cadenced voice, as if chanting blank verse, and with a delivery free alike from emphasis and from hesitation. Whether or not any wisdom were contained in these monologues, Philip only could tell; and he used to declare that they were replete with everything that was most sapient and profound. He never, in fact, gave in to the belief that his mother was in any respect deficient in mental effectiveness; on the contrary, he held her to be an altogether superior being, and argued that she appeared ‘queer’ to ordinary people only because the latter were too far below her in the intellectual scale to be able to appreciate her illustration. He was proud of her preference; and she yielded him every indulgence he could desire, save one:—she never permitted him to climb the Oak and share her mysterious vigils amidst the branches. ‘No,’ she would answer, smiling, to his entreaties, ‘no, dear, no—no. He is our friend, but it is to me he speaks; you must hear him only through me. Be content—be content! by-and-by you shall know all.’

‘But when will by-and-by come, mother?’

‘When the great change comes, and the seal is broken, and the prophecy is fulfilled, and the sibyl and her counsellor have vanished. There is time; do not seek to hasten the steps of fate. Love will lead the way, and pass through the valley of tribulation, and honour and wealth shall wait for him beyond. You are but a boy yet! be content! by-and-by you shall know all.’

‘But I don’t want you to vanish, or your counsellor either. Why should you vanish, and where are you going to vanish to?’

‘Those who impart happiness must not wait to behold its enjoyment. The bearers of evil tidings remain; but the heralds of joy pass on.’ What all this meant, Philip might have found it difficult to explain: but he was bound to consider it satisfactory. And then his mother, laying one hand on his shoulder, and with the other pointing upwards through the branches of the Oak, would say solemnly, ‘There—there is treasure! Seek for it!’

(*To be concluded.*)

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

Kildhurm's Oak.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEYDAY OF YOUTH.

THE conditions of life in this world do not permit boys to retain their boyhood indefinitely; and so it was that the boy Philip grew in time to be a young man, and to entertain the thoughts and aspirations proper to that important and interesting stage of human existence. He came of age, and a celebration was held in honour of that event; and after that he considered it to be a part of his duty to go forth and see the world. The world, as not infrequently happens in such cases, took more out of its beholder than its beholder could get in return from the world; in other words, Sir Philip Kildhurm spent the larger part of the fortune which his aunt Mrs. Chepstow had made over to him, in discovering that it is not so easy as it looks to be wise without experience. This curious bit of news having been duly recorded in his memory, he presently made his way back to Kildhurm Tower, which he found very much in the state in which he had left it; though it appeared to him rather more stupid and monotonous than of yore. However, young men are always fertile of expedients to relieve monotony; and the medicine which Sir Philip prescribed to himself in the present instance was the singularly original one of falling in love. He fell in love with an excellent and charming young lady; and she fell in love with him, which was probably more than he deserved: and in due course they were betrothed, and married. Within a year from the wedding-day, the new Lady Kildhurm presented her husband with a daughter; and soon after having done this, she died; but the little girl lived, and grew strong and vigorous and charming. She, indeed, is the heroine whom we have been looking for all through these weary and interminable Kildhurm generations.

The widower, whose somewhat frivolous and unsteady disposition had been sobered and steadied by the shock of his much beloved young wife's death, sought compensation for her loss in his little daughter. No father was ever more devoted than he; and now he fancied he had attained a deeper understanding of that old saying of his mother about the treasure above. Old Lady Kildhurm, it should be mentioned, was still living at nearly eighty

years of age, and was apparently neither more nor less vigorous than she had been twenty years before. Only now her hair was completely white, and hung down in long thick braids, reaching below her waist. Her face, also, had undergone a certain change. The vacant expression had given place to what might be described as a childlike look ; for it had all the serenity and frankness of a child, and the eyes possessed that unconscious quality of penetration that is born of the child's unsullied intuitions. When these untroubled eyes rested upon the beholder's, therefore, he generally looked away, if he was a bad man ; but if he was a good man he looked into them, and the further he looked, the more he found himself thinking, not of old age, but of childhood ; and if, further, he happened to be acquainted with little Hilda, the grand-daughter, he was apt to find himself thinking particularly of her. Certain it is that the infant woman and the aged one lost no time in becoming dearly attached to each other, as if they had been kindred spirits ; and when Hilda was three years old, her sibylline grandmother did an unprecedented thing ; for she took the child in her arms, and mounted with her to her seat in the Oak. Sir Philip almost feared for his precious little daughter's safety, and confidently expected to hear her break out into a clamour of alarm and aversion at the gloom and all the strange surroundings. But, as it turned out, the small neophyte underwent her initiation not only with composure but with gratification. When, after an hour's withdrawal from the world, the venerable sibyl restored her to her father's arms, Hilda seemed regretful rather than relieved that the experience was over.

‘ What did grandmamma show you ? ’ inquired Sir Philip.

But Hilda, with praiseworthy discretion, only looked at him and shook her wise little head, with a roguish smile in her brown eyes.

‘ Oh, so you are going to keep the secret as well ! ’ said Sir Philip, laughing.

‘ It is her secret now,’ said old Lady Kildhurm, laying her thin dark hand on the child's golden hair. ‘ The spirit of the Oak was my friend, but he is her servant. She is mistress of Kildhurm and all it contains. In her shall the race be blessed and their sorrows be comforted : and woe unto him who would thwart her purpose or dispute her will ! ’

All this might be true ; but the fact nevertheless remained that, as Hilda grew up, the worldly fortunes of Kildhurm went down ; until, at about the period of the young lady's seventeenth birthday, they were pretty nearly in as bad a condition as when, forty years before, Sir Norman had ridden out to show his friend Colonel Banyon the way over the Convent Cliff. Evidently, therefore, if Hilda was going to restore the fortunes of the race, she could not

set about the business too soon. Hilda herself, however, did not appear to have any idea how the thing was to be done ; nor (being a person of a disposition to derive a great deal of pleasure from a very economical expenditure) did she seem to think a fortune of any paramount importance. She performed her household avocations with cheerfulness and punctuality, and enjoyed her recreation on the sea-shore or the hills as heartily as if she had been mistress of ten thousand a year. But at last, luckily for Kildhurm, and for the reputation of prophecy, an unexpected occurrence took place. A strange young gentleman made his appearance in the neighbourhood.

He was in every respect a highly interesting object. He was blue-eyed, handsome in face and figure, courteous and brave. Though hardly more than twenty-five years old, he was a captain of Grenadiers, and had won his rank by gallant services in the American War. He was rich and well connected ; and it was reported that he had come into the neighbourhood to buy land, to build a house, and to settle down in it. His name was Harold Bramston ; and he was a bachelor.

Improbable as it may appear, one of the last people in the county to hear the news about Captain Bramston was the very person who was generally considered to be the most affected by it : namely, Miss Hilda Kildhurm. The first she knew about the matter was, that one afternoon, as she was sitting beneath the Oak, mending a rent that she had made in her frock the day before, she saw a gentleman ride along the road, and draw rein at the Tower gate ; and a moment afterwards she saw him pulling vigorously at the bell-handle. This proved (what Miss Hilda had already suspected) that the gentleman was a stranger ; for anybody who was not a stranger would have known that the bell of Kildhurm Tower had been cracked and done away with any time these ten years past. Now, it was unquestionably the duty of the Kildhurm family to be hospitable to strangers ; and since that family at present consisted of three members, one of whom—Sir Philip—was absent in the neighbouring market town, and another of whom—Miss Hilda's grandmother—was presumably asleep in the topmost chamber of the Tower ;—such being the state of affairs, it inevitably devolved upon the third and only available member—Miss Hilda herself—to do the honours of the occasion. So she arose, and paced demurely across the grass towards the stranger. As she drew near she perceived that he was very good-looking, in both senses of that phrase, and this discovery gave her a certain satisfaction. Moreover, when he turned to look at her, it was evident that he found her appearance agreeable, which was the more noteworthy inasmuch as she was by no means dressed to

receive company, and her hair was in disorder. She thought the stranger must be a man of great natural kindness, and very easy to please. When she was within speaking distance, therefore, she asked him, in a friendly tone, whether he wanted to see any one?

He eyed her for a moment very intently, as if she were the first young woman he had ever beheld: and he answered in a deep but very pleasant voice, lifting his hat from his forehead,

'I beg your pardon!' (which she thought quite unnecessary). 'I am Captain Bramston—Harold Bramston: you may chance to have heard mention made of me——?' He bowed slightly with an expectant look.

'No: I never heard of you before,' replied Hilda, with a meditative air, as if she were searching her memory to make sure.

Captain Bramston coloured a little. 'You are, I venture to suppose, Miss—that is, Miss——'

'Yes, I am Miss Kildhurm,' she replied gravely. 'Hilda Kildhurm,' she added, after a pause.

The Captain hereupon doffed his hat again, and continued to hold it in his hand while he spoke.

'I am happy and honoured to meet Miss Kildhurm,' he said. 'Though you have never heard of me, I heard of you long ago, and I have often thought of you—pardon the liberty!—especially of late. I am a sort of relative of yours, you must know: a distant one, I fear; but still——'

'A distant one is better than none at all,' put in Hilda, intending no more than to help him out with his sentence: for he seemed to find a difficulty in finishing his sentences; and when he broke off in the midst of them, he had a way of resting his eyes on her face, as if he expected to find the conclusion of it there.

'Thank you for thinking it worth while to say that!' exclaimed the Captain, straightening himself and lifting his head with a very bright glance.

'Oh, you must not think I meant that—exactly!' Hilda said in some haste and panic, and with a flush that may have indicated her regret at having been born such a fool.

The Captain was certainly very kind. He took no notice of her embarrassment, but went on, smoothing the feather in his hat as he spoke,

'I was going to explain, in regard to our being relations, that I had a grand-uncle whose name was Banyon. He was an Indian colonel.'

'Oh, I know all about him,' said Hilda, glad to show that she

was not quite such a fool after all. ‘He was in love with his cousin, poor old Mrs. Chepstow, my grand-aunt; and he left her all his precious stones in his will; only she never got them, because, poor man——’ Here Hilda paused, and threw a glance at the handsome young officer.

‘Because he was drowned, wasn’t he?’ said he—smiling, however, in a very unnephew-like manner. ‘And the precious stones were drowned along with him, of course?’

‘That is what the common people believe,’ said Miss Kildhurm with a certain reserve in her manner that prompted the Captain to say,

‘Ah! then, if I may ask it, what is Miss Kildhurm’s belief?’

‘I believe,’ said she, after a moment’s silence, ‘that there is a secret, and a mystery!’

‘A mystery?’ repeated the Captain, opening his blue eyes. ‘Where?’

Hilda’s brown eyes met his blue ones with a grave and somewhat doubtful expression: but at last she raised her hand and pointed to the Oak, saying nothing.

‘In the Oak?’ Captain Bramston at first reddened a little, as if he thought he were being made game of; but in a moment he exclaimed in a tone full of interest, ‘Oh, is that the famous Oak—the Oak of Kildhurm?’

‘Yes, that is our Oak,’ replied Hilda, with a breath of pride.

‘You see, I had heard of it before,’ said the Captain.

‘I should think there was no one who had not heard of the Oak of Kildhurm,’ replied Hilda, rather amused at the contrary suggestion. ‘I suppose there might be some who couldn’t,’ she added charitably, reflecting that India and America were a long way off, and their inhabitants probably very ignorant.

‘May I see it?’ resumed Captain Bramston.

‘You cannot see the mystery!’ Hilda answered with some awe in her voice. ‘I have not seen that myself; I only know a little about it. My grandmamma is the only one who has seen!’

‘I was speaking of the Oak. As to the mystery, I shan’t ask about seeing that as long as I may see you.’

‘I don’t see how you can say that,’ replied Hilda, ‘since you have known me only so short a time.’

‘But I have been waiting to know you a long time, the Captain was bold enough to say: ‘ever since I was a man. And the longer one waits to know a woman, the faster he gets to know her when he begins.’

‘But I have not been waiting any time at all to know you, and yet——’ began Hilda. But there she broke off, and said, ‘You

will think I have no manners, Captain Bramston. I have forgotten to ask you on what errand you are come here. And will you not step into the house and have some refreshment? I expect my father back in an hour or so.'

'Miss Kildhurm, have I offended you?' said the Captain very humbly.

'No, indeed; anything but that!'

'Else you would not speak so formally.'

'I must not speak as I might speak if my father were here,' answered the young lady with a blush. 'I am the representative of the family until he comes, and I must speak for them and not for myself.'

'Then—I wish your father were here!' exclaimed the Captain.

'So do I.'

'Why do you wish it? So that you might get rid of me? or so that you might not continue to be the representative of your family?'

'That does not seem to me a very wise question. But will you not step into the house?'

'You were sitting under the Oak when I first saw you: would you mind letting me come there?'

'Wherever you wish,' replied Miss Kildhurm graciously: and she led the way to the Oak, and she and the Captain established themselves beneath its shadow.

The Captain thought it was the loveliest day and the loveliest spot that he had ever seen; which simply showed that he must have been a very unobservant young man hitherto, because, in his travels about the world, he had met with scenes and with climates far lovelier than Kildhurm could boast of at its best. But the Captain, though he praised the prospect, looked at it much less than at his companion; and if he had said that his travels had never brought him in contact with anybody like her, he would probably have been declaring more nearly what he felt to be the truth. She was so simple, and yet so dignified: so naïve, and yet so sensible: so lovely, and yet so unconscious. He gazed, and wondered, and blessed his stars for having brought him round the world, and reserved this fairest of all sights for him at the end of his pilgrimages and dangers. Yes, it was a blessed fortune that had put it into his mind to come and settle down here, in this remote and beautiful region, here to make his home and to spend his days. And it was a beneficent Providence, surely, that had kept his heart free and unstained through those perilous years of early youth, when hearts are so apt to go astray. What happiness to think that he might say to this charming maiden, 'You are

the first woman I have loved; and I am not wholly unfit to take your hand in mine, and to look in your dear eyes!' For it was nothing less than this that the Captain already imagined himself as saying to Miss Kildhurm.

But having got thus far in his thoughts he began to entertain gloomy and portentous fears. What if Miss Kildhurm should not respond to this sudden and unlooked-for passion of his? What should she know of love? And why should she love him? This last was a question which Harold Bramston might not have thought it necessary to ask himself in respect of every woman that he had met: but as regarded Hilda Kildhurm, he found himself destitute of any vanity whatever, and inclined to look upon himself as the most insignificant of men. The most insignificant of men? Was there, then, some other man who was more significant—or who possessed more significance in Hilda's eyes? This idea was torture to Captain Bramston, and he tried to put it away and to fight against it; but the more he tried, the more numerous and plausible were the reasons which suggested themselves to him for supposing it to be true. There must be young men enough in the country-side to love and woo fifty Hildas; and such a Hilda as this might raise up lovers to herself in the midst of a desert. And if she were loved, why might she not love in return? Oh! misery, why might she not be engaged to somebody at this very moment? Was it consistent with human nature to suppose that she could have lived for a little less than twenty years in the world without having been obliged to engage herself to somebody? Captain Bramston groaned inwardly, and cursed his luck for not having made him to be born and raised under the shadow of Kildhurm's Oak.

And what were Hilda's thoughts all this time? She said to herself that there was a sensation in her heart which she had never known till now: a lightness, a fulness, and yet a fear: it affected her voice, so that she found it difficult to speak evenly, or to breathe as regularly as usual, or to keep under control the blood that sought her cheeks. Moreover, a smile was ever attempting to manifest itself on her lips, without her being able to account to herself satisfactorily for its being there. She told herself that this was very silly; but its being silly did not prevent it from being rather pleasant. Another singularity in her sensations was, that she felt a great tenderness and affection for the world at large. Everything seemed kind to her, and considerate of her happiness. There was a bird up somewhere in the branches of the Oak that sang just the kind of song that she would have liked to sing, if she had known how. Surely the sunshine need not

have fallen with such mellow radiance of warm colour on the grass and on the grey tower, if it had not wished to do her an especial favour : surely the sea need not have murmured with such languorous sweetness beneath the cliff, if it had not wished to echo the inarticulate harmony that whispered in her own soul. And, by the way (not that this had anything to do with it), what a delightful voice Captain Bramston had, and what a noble countenance, and what a gentle and withal spirited expression, and what a picturesque way of leaning against the trunk of the Oak, and of occasionally moving his hand when he spoke, and of throwing back his head when he laughed ! What a strange freak of destiny to bring this young hero all round the world to sit here at her feet at last, and make a summer afternoon so memorable ! It was a remarkably brief afternoon, however, and once gone, it would never return. It would never return. There was a sweet pain in that reflection—the sweeter, the more painful. Yes, Captain Bramston would ride away by-and-by, and he would never come back. Why should he come back ? There could never be such another afternoon : there could never be such another Captain Bramston : there could never be such another longing, and tenderness, and fear as abode now in Hilda's heart. Such things, such times, came once and came no more. As Hilda said this to herself, she felt quite melancholy in the midst of her happiness ; and soft tears stood in her eyes as she looked seaward.

It must not be supposed that these two young people allowed anything of what was passing in their minds to appear in their conversation : by no means ! They talked of anything rather than that. The Captain gave an interesting account of his adventures abroad, and described the American Indians, and General Lafayette, and General Washington, and General Arnold, and unfortunate Major André, who was so cruelly hanged. Captain Bramston was of opinion that Arnold was much more deserving of hanging than André. To all this Hilda listened and replied and questioned ; and then, being questioned in turn, she attempted to give some account of her own life at Kildhurm ; whom she saw, what she did, what she wanted to do : but it all struck her as being profoundly uninteresting and empty, and she was sure that Captain Bramston must share her opinion, though he very politely made believe that he liked to hear her. So the hours passed away and the sun reached the hills, and Hilda expected every moment to hear Captain Bramston say that now he must be going. But he stayed on in the most unaccountable way. It was strange, too, how well acquainted with each other they seemed to have become, though they had been but so short a time together, and had talked

about such external matters. It almost seemed as if they must have known what was passing, unuttered, in each other's hearts. Could it be that those things that can never be spoken manage to get themselves expressed, somehow, in the tones of the voice and the glances of the eyes, and effect more in a few hours than words can tell in as many months?

'You have not yet told me, Captain Bramston,' Hilda said at last, 'the reason why you came here.'

'I did not know why I came till after I got here,' said the Captain.

Hilda gazed at him inquiringly.

'I knew as soon as I saw you,' the intrepid gentleman pursued.

'Oh! then it was not anything worth knowing!'

'I care more about it than about anything else in the world!'

'Then, what did you care most about before this?'

'About—myself, I suppose!'

'You should have left somebody else to do that!'

'Somebody else? Who?'

'Oh—anybody!'

Captain Bramston took hold of her hand, and his eyes were ardent. 'Miss Kildhurm, I—may I tell you something?'

She made an effort to draw her hand away. 'I think I would rather you didn't—at least, with that voice, and—'

'Don't turn away from me!' exclaimed this impetuous warrior; and he kissed her hand passionately. 'I cannot help it! Hilda, I—'

An imperative voice here interrupted the young people, and brought Captain Bramston to his feet. 'Stop, sir!' it said. 'Whoever you are, this conduct is inadmissible. Stand back, sir!'

It was Sir Philip; and old Lady Kildhurm was with him. Sir Philip was looking as stern—and, indeed, fierce—as it was in his nature to do. Hilda, rising also, said appealingly,

'Don't, father! It wasn't his fault!'

'Not his fault!' Sir Philip, in a mixture of amazement and indignation, glared first at his daughter, then at the handsome stranger, who, however, met his look frankly and resolutely. For a few moments, the baronet's face worked strangely: then, much to the surprise and more to the relief of the guilty persons, he burst into a shout of laughter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WEDDING-GIFT.

IT was not so difficult, after this, to make the necessary explanations and apologies. Sir Philip had heard about Captain Bramston before, though Hilda had not; and, in the bottom of his heart, he did not object to regard him in the light of a possible son-in-law. But it would not do to confess this just at present. Captain Bramston had stood to his guns, and, on the spot where he stood, had declared his love for Hilda Kildhurm, and demanded Sir Philip's consent to their betrothal.

'I can give you nothing of the kind, sir,' replied the Baronet, endeavouring to look immittigable. 'Your request is as premature as—as it is contrary to sound principle. Any one would suppose, Captain Bramston, that you expected the world to come to an end by to-morrow morning, by the haste you are in to have your affairs settled!'

'In this case, Sir Philip,' replied the Captain, with equal respect and firmness, 'sound principle is of no use. The falling in love is an accomplished fact. The next thing to settle is the date of the wedding.'

'Upon my word, Captain Bramston,' the Baronet exclaimed, 'if you are as pushing in war as you seem to be in other matters, you should have been a general long ago. But we will, if you please, dismiss this subject for the present. I am in no hurry to lose my daughter in the first place; and moreover, in an affair of this nature, I could not think of deciding anything without consulting Lady Kildhurm, my mother.'

Lady Kildhurm and Hilda had withdrawn during this colloquy between the gentlemen, and Hilda had gone into the house. But as the Baronet and Captain Bramston, still conversing earnestly, slowly made their way across the lawn, they were suddenly aware that Lady Kildhurm was again near them. They halted, and were silent.

She was, at this time, almost at the extreme limit of old age; yet her eyes were clear and her bearing dignified; and so far from her mental infirmity having become exaggerated, it had grown year by year less obtrusive, though she was at least as far as ever from being on normal terms with the material world. She lived in a world of her own; but she accommodated the latter to the former more easily than before. So serene and unexaggerated were her tones and gestures, that a stranger would hardly have

suspected that she was virtually unconscious of what most people call the realities of life.

When the venerable sibyl was within a yard or so of Harold Bramston, she paused, with her face and the palms of her hands turned towards him: and without seeming to look at him in the usual way, she still had the air of taking his measure so keenly and fully, that, unless the Captain's conscience was cleaner than most men's, he must have passed an uneasy minute or two. But at length the sibyl raised her hands slowly and let them fall again with a gesture like a benediction; and the expression of her face was gracious as she said, in a gentle and flowing voice,

'He that rode over the Convent Cliff was a true man; and a spirit akin to his is here. If the treasure reveal itself to him, let him take it: he is worthy of it. I have waited long, I am weary. Lord, now speedily wilt Thou suffer me to depart. So be it!'

At this undeniable declaration in the young Captain's favour, Sir Philip felt a great deal more satisfaction than he was at all disposed to show; and the end of it was that the two lovers were allowed to stroll off by themselves beneath the Oak, and there formally to renew and re-seal the compact, in the making of which the Baronet had so aptly surprised them. That evening, after Hilda had gone to her chamber, the Baronet and Captain had a private confabulation in the former's study. The Captain then and there made a full statement regarding his position in the world, more particularly from the pecuniary point of view. It appeared that his circumstances were more than easy; that he had absolute control over nearly a hundred and fifty thousand pounds; and that he was prepared to settle any part of this sum, or the whole of it, according as Sir Philip pleased, on his wife, on the day of their marriage. He only wished that he could do something more.

'I must say, Bramston,' exclaimed Sir Philip, laughing, 'that you are more dangerously in love than any man I ever saw or heard of. You must go off somewhere for a month and see if you can't get rid of a little of it. I shall positively refuse to sign settlements with a man in so pitiable a condition as you are now. Recollect, my good sir, that Hilda goes to you literally penniless; and that I never should feel comfortable if I had not left open to you every avenue of escape in my power. Besides, don't you see that you will be paying one another a finer mutual compliment by waiting a while and seeking distractions, than by coming together at once, and so losing all opportunity of making sacrifices? Well, whether you see it or not, those are my orders, and you will have to put up with them.'

' You will of course allow us to correspond ? ' demanded the Captain, when he saw that he was beaten on the main point.

' I should greatly prefer not.'

' Then I will write to her, Sir Philip, in spite of you ! ' cried out the other, firing up.

' Oh, very well : in that case I agree,' rejoined Sir Philip with a twinkle in his eyes. ' You may write to her five times in the course of the month—choosing your own times, whether all in one day, or once in every six. But are you sure a month will be long enough to get your affairs in order ? '

' Oh, Sir Philip ! And they are in order. They have been in charge of a friend of mine for three years past. I shall have a look through his accounts, so as to see exactly where I stand—that will take me about three hours, I should say—and then I shall have nothing else to do until the month is up. Six times a week am I to write, did you say ? Why not make it six times a day ? '

' Ha, ha, ha ! But as regards this friendly man of business of yours : you are quite certain he is trustworthy ? That's a lot of property to leave out of your hands for three years—especially if you only require three hours in which to look through the accounts ! '

' I trust him, dear Sir Philip, as I trust myself. If you only knew him——'

' Quite right ! if I only knew him, of course I should not have made the inquiry. As it is—having known what it was to lose money in my youth—I did make it ! And now, Captain Bramston, as I can't ask you to spend the night here, I must bid you good-bye. I shall be glad to see you back, safe and sound, when your month is up ; and I won't pretend to say that I don't believe you'll come, and that Hilda won't expect you. As for the money matters, of course it's a capital thing to have a rich son-in-law ; but I must confess that I should have liked you a good deal better if honours had been a little more equally divided ! '

On these terms the two gentlemen parted ; little anticipating what was to happen.

Hilda received her first letter on the day following her lover's departure, he having written it on his way to London, and despatched it back to her by special messenger. She did not expect a letter on the next day, nor on the next, and not much on the day after that ; and this was well, for on no one of these days did a letter come. A week passed, and no letter. Ten days, and no letter. Two weeks, and still no letter. It was now apparent, even to Sir Philip, who had affected to make great fun of her at first,

that something must have happened. The address which Captain Bramston had given had been at his business manager's; Sir Philip privately sent a messenger thither, to make inquiries; but at the end of the third week the messenger returned, and brought with him the astounding news that there were no news to bring! Nothing was known at the address given either of the manager or of Captain Bramston. Was the man dead, or an impostor, or had he simply changed his mind? It was at all events plain that he would never again show his face at Kildhurm Tower.

It was necessary, therefore, to have a very painful interview with Hilda. Poor Sir Philip recoiled at the prospect; but it was not to be avoided; and at last he sent for her, and having taken her by both hands and kissed her, he opened his mouth to begin. But she suddenly and quietly laid her hand upon his lips.

'I know what you are going to say, father, and you need not say it.'

'You have given him up, then? That's my brave girl!'

'I have not given him up. He is the same to me as ever, and I to him. I feel that he is true. I should know it if he was not. You need not be uneasy or angry, dear father; and above all, you need not try to persuade me that this is not so. He will come back; and we shall be happier even than we thought of being before.'

'Has my mother spoken?' demanded Sir Philip, after a long pause.

'She believes as I do: but it is not from her belief that I believe; it is from myself.'

'I shall not contradict you, my daughter,' said Sir Philip, after another silence. 'I will even say that it is possible—as everything is possible—that you may be right. But one thing I must ask of you. How long do you mean to hope? What day will you call the last?'

'The last day of the month, to be sure, father. That is the day on which he will come.'

'What makes you say that, my daughter?'

'Because that is the day on which he promised to come!' returned Hilda with an involuntary smile. 'Do you think Harold would not keep his promise?'

The last day of the month came, and Hilda appeared with her best frock on, and with fresh flowers in her hair. 'He will be here at dinner,' she said; and she made her arrangements accordingly, setting a chair for him, and decorating that and his plate with leaves and blossoms. Sir Philip looked on with a heavy

heart; but he held his peace. The faith of his child appalled him, but he dared not share it, and the moment was not yet come to repudiate it. His agitation was so great that he strove in vain to conceal it: but Hilda, though her colour was high and her eyes bright, was as calm and confident as if her lover had arrived the day before. Dinner-time drew near; and shortly before the hour struck, Harold appeared at the door, as if by magic.

Sir Philip started up from his chair with a great hoarse shout, and remained stationary. Hilda came up to her lover, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him heartily! As for Harold, he looked haggard and grim, and he made scarce a show of returning Hilda's caress.

'Come, now, sit down,' she said, in the most natural and sensible way in the world, 'and tell us why you have not written, and what all this trouble has been about!'

'It is better that I should tell you at once,' said Harold, in a husky voice. 'All the money that I had is gone. I am almost a beggar. The friend whom I trusted—' He stopped for a few moments and then went on, 'I followed him—all this month until to-day I have been hunting after him: but he is gone, and all is gone; and I am come, Sir Philip, to release your daughter from her engagement, and to be gone also.'

So saying Captain Bramston got up from the chair in which he had unconsciously seated himself, and stood with his head bent, and his eyes on the floor.

Hilda broke into an irrepressible little laugh. 'How silly you are, Harold,' she said, 'to make so much fuss about a little money! Nobody paid us to fall in love with each other, and why should we be paid to be married?'

Harold raised his face, now flushed to the roots of his hair, and his eyes burning. 'But what say you, Sir Philip?' he cried in a sharp, ringing voice.

'I say I should marry her, if I were in your place,' answered the Baronet, with humorous indifference; 'and the next time you get a fortune, take better care what you do with it. Meanwhile, shake hands, my dear boy; and let me observe that I'm uncommonly glad (and surprised) to see you.'

'Your happiness is near,' said Lady Kildhurm, who had entered the room so quietly that none of the three had noticed her. 'To-night the spell is broken. The saying shall be made perfect. It shall be well with you, and with me. To-morrow, early in the morning, search the Oak.'

On that night all in the household were visited by strange dreams; and through the dreams they heard a sound of a voice

chanting a weird song, and rising higher and clearer; until at last there came a deep, booming sound like thunder: and after that the chant was heard no more.

In the morning, early, Harold and Hilda went out, and walked arm-in-arm to the cliff where the Oak had stood. But lo! the Oak was gone. The overhanging promontory on which it grew had parted from the main-land during the night, wrenching the mighty tree with it. But the ocean had received the tree in its arms, and had carried it away, never again to be seen by mortal eyes. For the waves had been the friends of the mysterious Oak from the beginning; and they had drawn a veil of solemn mystery over its end.

But where was the ancient sibyl? She too had vanished, singing her wild chant; perhaps to find in another world the treasure whereof she had prophesied so long on this earth. At all events, no one ever saw her, living or dead, after that night; and it came to be believed that she had been borne on her last journey amidst the branches of the tree which she had made her home.

But on the brink of the freshly-made chasm still stood a tall and rugged fragment of the Oak, which had remained in its place when the bulk of the tree was wrenched away. High up in this fragment there appeared a narrow and deep crevice or hole, now revealed, section-wise, by the rending asunder of the wood. At the bottom of this hole was seen a small wallet of embroidered leather: and when Harold shook the fragment of the tree, the wallet fell from its place, and bursting open on the ground, a flash of precious stones greeted the lovers' wondering eyes. Amidst the stones was found the lost signet ring of Norman Kildhurm.

In that narrow hole, therefore, these gems must have rested ever since the felonious right hand of Sir Norman had placed them there. But he, hurriedly striving to withdraw his hand, was caught by the narrow mouth of the hole; and fancying, in his guilty fear, that the demon of the Oak had got hold of him, he had screamed three times in uncontrollable terror, and had torn himself loose, mangling his hand, and leaving his signet ring behind. And the desperate vehemence of his effort had caused him to overbalance himself; so he fell backward through the branches to the ground, and his neck had been miserably broken by the fall. Such, at least, is the commonly accepted explanation of that dark catastrophe.

But to whom belonged the jewels thus strangely brought to light? Harold, as the nearest living relative of the murdered Colonel, was his legitimate heir; to him, accordingly, the long-deferred but most opportune inheritance came. To tell all that

he did with it would require a new story. Whatever it was, it was done with the approval of his unworldly-wise wife, and of the worldly-wise Sir Philip, his father-in-law. For, after the days of mourning for the vanished Lady Kildhurm were over, Harold and Hilda were married, and lived together in much happiness, though they were never able to agree as to which had the best of the other in the matter of settlements. In process of time they became the parents of the child who grew up to be the beautiful Lady Mainwaring of our own day, and who, as has been intimated, deigned to furnish so modern a person as the present writer with the materials for this history of Kildhurm's Oak.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

(*The End.*)

The Showman's Ghost.

CHAPTER I.

THE blue-faced Tasmanian Devil slumbered peacefully ; the great aboriginal ape of the Andes pursued the aboriginal flea ; the fretful porcupine, like a literary man out of harness, had laid down his quills, and dozed at ease ; the lordly lion yawned lazily, mindful, possibly, in the sultry heat, of the African desert in which he roamed in infant days ; the polar bear alone was disquieted, and he went up and down in his den like a professional walker against time. It was nearly noon on a roasting English summer day, and Mr. Solomon Varley's unrivalled peripatetic zoological exhibition was pitched upon an English village green. The village was the centre of a scattered group of sleepy little places, and Solomon had done fairly good business yesterday, and looked to-day for better business still. On the morrow he and his unrivalled exhibition would be away again, in search of fresh halting-places and a public new.

Solomon sate with his wife and daughter in a house on wheels. The house was painted a golden yellow, and the panels on its walls were picked out in red. It had snowy muslin curtains to its little windows, and the brass knocker on the door glistened like gold. Within, everything was snug and in miniature, as in a state-room aboard ship. At any breath of air the canvas roof of the show made a flapping noise like a sail, and kept up the aboard-ship illusion. Solomon himself was nautical in aspect, being brown of complexion, through much contact with all sorts of weather, and attired in a suit of blue pilot cloth and a low black shiny hat of seagoing pattern. Mrs. Solomon, whose name was Sarah, was also of a nautical pattern, looking generally cleared for action, in a dress which displayed her shapely ankles and her plump brown arms. This dress was cut away a little below the neck, showing something very like a shirt-front, from which rose an undeniable stand-up collar, surrounded by a red scarf tied in a sailor's knot. Her hat was identical in pattern with Solomon's, but was worn rakishly at the back of her head, where it rested on a coil of tidy black hair, giving its wearer a clear look-out aloft.

' This is about as 'ot as they make 'em, ain't it, missis ? ' said

Solomon, alluding to the weather, and blowing an idle cloud. His voice was a trifle hoarse with constant open-air oratory.

'I hope Jim's a-keeping Jack pretty cool,' said Mrs. Solomon Varley.

'Ah!' said Solomon, rubbing his pilot-cloth knees with his brown hands; and then, rising slowly, 'I'll take a look round, missis.'

Jim was one of the human staff, and Jack was the polar bear. Jack was apt to grow delicate in hot weather, and it was Jim's business to douche him. Solomon took the promised look round, and watched Jim as he splashed the grizzly Jack.

'That's right, Jim,' said Solomon, 'keep him cool. This weather tells on him, poor creetur.'

'Ah!' said Jim, with an air half-mournful, half-resentful. 'I don't find nobody to dowk me, master. A cove gets dry inside an' out on a day like this.'

'Theer's a spot or two o' mysture in the bucket yet,' returned Solomon; and Jim, whose predilection ran in favour of other liquids, growled, and splashed Jack with savage energy. 'Well,' said Solomon, who in Mrs. Varley's absence was always inclined to be sympathetic with the thirsty, 'it is a brilin' day. Theer's a tanner for you. Don't make a beast o' yourself.'

Jim, the tight-trouser'd and loose-shirted, dexterously caught the coin, spat upon it, pocketed it, jerked out a 'Thanky, master,' and took up his buckets, but lingered.

'See the bloke in the stor 'at 'ere again yesterday, master?' he inquired, with a transparent pretence of having asked the question casually.

Solomon nodded.

'Uncommon fond o' wild beasts *he* is, ain't *he*, master?'

Solomon nodded again.

'What's *he* arter?' inquired Jim, dropping the buckets on the sawdusted turf. 'What's *he* mean by comin' prowlin' around wherever we pitches? What's his little game? Come now, master, out with it. What's his little game?'

'James,' said Solomon, 'I worn't born yesterday, nor yet my missis. We know what's what, if you'll allow us. I've seen coves in all sorts of 'ats in *my* time—white 'ats and stovepipe 'ats as well as stor 'ats—took the same way for a day or two, an' what's it come to? I knowed a feller attached to a wild-beast establishment once,' said Solomon, with a look of undefined humour, before which James hung his head, 'as was took the same way. But he 'ad the good sense to hold his jor about it, an' smother his secret in his own buzzum. That's what he had the good sense to do, James.'

James sullenly, and with an air of discomfiture, took up his buckets, and made as if he would retire; but, dropping them once more, he turned, blushing confusedly.

'Pre'aps,' he said, 'that party got used to keepin' a pretty sharp look-out, and pre'aps, howsummever his feelins is despised, he'll go on a-keepin' of it.'

With that Parthian shot James retired, bearing his buckets with him, and Solomon, leisurely walking round the establishment, took a look at his properties.

'Maybe Jim's right,' he said when he had completed the circuit. Balancing himself on one foot he lifted the other and knocked the ashes from his pipe, tapping gently and thoughtfully on the sole. 'Maybe Jim's right. I'll tell the missis to keep her weather eye open.'

He strolled back to the house on wheels, consulting a fat watch by the way.

'Time, missis, time,' he said, standing on the lowest step of the ladder and looking through the door. 'Wheer are *you* off to, Virgie?'

Mr. Varley's daughter bore the name of Virginia, indifferently shortened to Virgie or Jennie, according to fancy. She had enjoyed the advantages of a finishing school, and was very shy and pretty. She was shy even with her parents, to whose wandering home she had returned a year before with her pretty head stuffed with the lifelike romances of the feminine writers of this favoured age.

'I am going into the village to buy some floss silk,' said Virgie, blushing, as she nearly always did when spoken to.

'All right, my darlin',' said Solomon, patting her cheek with his big brown fingers as she came down the steps. 'Don't walk too fast. It's a roaster to-day. Time, missis.'

Away tripped Virginia, and Mrs. Varley, leisurely descending, followed her husband to the platform of the show, where she ensconced herself at the seat of custom, whilst Solomon assumed the active directorship of the band. The band, comprising thirty-five instruments, groaned, wheezed, banged, and blared in a big box, obedient to a rotary handle. The crowd flowed in, and the sound of copper and silver tinkled pleasantly through the tunes played by the mechanical orchestra, whose strains had long ceased to charm the musical ear of its proprietor. Solomon, indeed, was wont to relate a story to the discredit of the orchestra.

'One day,' said Sol, 'I takes a pitch right oppisyte a chemis' an' druggis's place, an' in doo time I toons up. Well, he stands it regular game an' plucky for about half a hour or so, an' then he

walks over. "Mister," he says—quite the polite gentleman—"I ain't a complainin' party *as a rule*," he says, "but your orgin is too much for me." "Well, governor," I ups an' says, "you ought to have more human natur' than complain," I says: "I know it's hard on you," I says, "to have to listen to it, but you'll think o' me sometimes," I says, "with a tear o' pity on account o' my havin' to play it regular, won't you?" It closed him up, if you'll believe me,' Solomon would add, 'as sudden as a clasp-knife.'

On the present occasion Mr. Varley ground away mechanically, and was more bent upon observing the faces of the crowd than even on the pleasant tinkle which made its way through the wheeze and blare of his own music. There were straw hats in plenty before him, but the particular straw hat of whose owner Jim had warned him was not there, and the showman was not sorry for its absence. The common interest in zoology was not strong enough to induce young men of gentlemanly exterior to follow his unrivalled collection from village to village, and Solomon had needed no warning as to the object which caused the wearer of the straw hat to follow the show with a persistence so unusual.

Perhaps Solomon was mentally shortsighted. Perhaps, notwithstanding two-and-twenty years of matrimonial experience, he was little versed in the ways of women. Possibly his own open-hearted nature and sterling honesty and straightforwardness helped to blind-fold him. Virginia had gone into the village to buy floss silk—quite the most innocent of errands. And the young gentleman in the straw hat was not anywhere in the immediate neighbourhood of the show. Quite a satisfactory matter. It never occurred to him that the young gentleman might meet Virginia. He would have been ready to knock down anybody who had told him that Virginia had gone to meet the young gentleman.

The showman's daughter went along the shady side of the street swinging a dainty little basket in her hand. She bought the floss silk to satisfy conscience and answer possible inquiries, and then she strolled on under the shade of pleasant boughs into a leafy lane. She blushed and trembled as she went, and was many a time half inclined to turn back again, but by-and-by a young man wearing a straw hat heaved in sight, and, throwing away a half-smoked cigar, turned his lounging walk into a quick one, and approached her smiling, hat in hand.

'So you are here, after all!' he said gently.

'I shouldn't have come,' fluttered Virginia, 'if I had dreamt that you would be here.'

'Don't,' said the wearer of the straw hat pleadingly,—'don't be so cruel as to say so.'

'Don't think I came to meet you,' said the little coquette.
'As if I should think of such a thing!'

'I hope you will think of it sometimes,' said her companion softly. 'If you knew how lonely it is to wait! If you knew how hard it is to go away without having seen you!'

'I can't always be strolling about country lanes,' said Virginia pertly; 'I come as often as I can.'

'You do try to come, then?' he asked.

'How you do try to trap one, Mr. Verschoyle!' said Virginia.

'Say "George,"' said Mr. Verschoyle, ignoring the charge.

'No, I shan't!'

'Say "George,"' pleaded Mr. Verschoyle again, stealing an arm about her waist.

'Well,' she said, half tremulously defiant of her own tremors, and half tender, 'George.' She only whispered it, and blushed like a peony. He stooped down and kissed her. She made a movement of resistance, and another, as if she would free herself of his encircling arm. But he knew his power by this time, and kept his place, and took his kiss and strolled on by her side under the shadow of the leafy trees. The foolish captive little heart fluttered beneath his hand so that he could count its beatings. He never thought or cared to think how sadly and sorely it would beat in days to come because of him. He was a well-looking youngster, with nothing of the traditional villain about him. A fair face, a tall and lithe figure, with a good breadth across the chest and shoulders, a drooping blonde moustache, frank eyes enough, a gentle voice, a handsome hand—a little too much bejewelled—but no cloven hoof, no sinister aspect to affright or warn. Faust had no need of Mephistopheles to teach him how to woo this silly Marguerite. He had trapped wiser women in his time unaided.

And little Virginia was in love with him. Her head was full of foolish visions of fine things to wear, and a noble house to live in, and imposing servants to wait on her, and a carriage with fine horses, with footmen holding on behind. To be honest with her, these visions made no part of her love, but were only part of what his love would dower her with. So they walked along the leafy lane beneath the shadow of the pleasant boughs, and he lied to her and she believed him.

CHAPTER II.

IT rained on an August night in an English seaport town as English summer skies know how to rain. The tempest had gathered suddenly after weeks of sultry weather, and the clouds

burst in a deluge. The great drops fell with a sound of continuous thunder on the canvas roof of Solomon Varley's show, but the proprietor of that establishment was filled with satisfaction. The sudden storm, although it had dispersed the crowd in front, had hastened one half of the people inside, and Solomon had such a house as he had rarely seen. It was feeding time, and, double prices being charged at that hour, Mrs. Varley at the seat of custom had reaped a fourfold silver harvest. The tent was well illuminated, but every now and again the lightning glared through the canvas, and some of the kinglier sort of beasts answered the following thunder thunderously. There was a certain sort of majesty in being proprietor of a wild-beast show under such circumstances, and Solomon was in his glory.

Suddenly his wife came in with a shawl over her head and forced her way through the crowd. Solomon, seeing that she made towards him, went easily to meet her. She was pale and breathing hard, and clutching him by the arm with both hands she gasped out two words:—

‘ Jennie’s gone !’

‘ On a night like this !’ said Solomon. ‘ She’ll catch her death.’

‘ She’s gone, Sol, she’s gone !’ cried the mother, almost screaming.

‘ What d’ye mean ?’ asked Solomon. People began to stare at them. ‘ Come out o’ this,’ he said, and seizing her by the arm, he forced his way through the crowd to the outer platform. The rain came down in straight-ruled glittering lines, blurring the lights in the shops opposite. One blinding flash of lightning fell as Solomon and his wife came upon the platform, and a tremendous roar of thunder followed.

‘ Now, what’s the matter ?’ he asked, when the awful sound had rolled itself away.

The woman wrung her hands and moaned.

‘ She’s gone, Sol, she’s gone !’ was all the answer she could make.

‘ What d’ye mean ?’ cried the showman, refusing to recognise a meaning.

‘ Oh, Sol, dear Sol !’ she cried, clinging to him and breaking into tears.

‘ Come along !’ cried Solomon, shaking himself free and seizing her arm again. ‘ Come along !’ He hurried her through the pelting rain to the house on wheels. ‘ Now, what’s the matter ?’

‘ Sol,’ cried his wife, waving her hands up and down like a mad-woman, ‘ she’s run away.’

Solomon's face was white beneath its bronze already, but at that cruel stab he turned ghastly, and his hands dropped to his sides like lead.

'Here's a note,' cried the distracted mother, now fumbling at her dress, and now waving her hands wildly. 'Here's a note she left behind. Oh, Sol! oh, my poor Sol, as loved her dear! Oh, Sol! bear up like a dear good soul! Don't break your heart, don't break your heart!' And saying this she cast her arms about him, and swooned and lost all knowledge of her agony for a little while. Solomon laid her gently down, and stood above her like a statue.

A step came up the ladder, but he did not hear it. A hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he turned. There stood Jim, wild-eyed, dripping wet, and as pale as death.

'She knows?' said the man, half recoiling at sight of the prostrate figure.

'Yes,' said Solomon, 'she knows.'

'I see her go,' panted Jim, for he was out of breath with running. 'I foller, thinking somethin' was the matter to take her out on such a night as this.' A flash of lightning heralded a peal of thunder overhead, and the showman could only see his moving lips, but heard nothing more until the noise had rolled away again. 'They got into a cab an' drove away. I could see as they was a-makin' for the King's Dock or else for the South Pier, an' I run like mad, but I lost sight of 'em.'

Solomon heard this, but returned no word. When it was all spoken he moved slowly away, and, taking up a glass, poured water into it from a brown pitcher, and then sat down beside his wife and moistened her lips and temples.

'Ain't you a-goin' to do nothing?' cried Jim. 'Ain't you a-goin' to foller her to the world's end? Ain't you a-goin' to catch that feller, if you travel till you're grey afore you do it, and twist his wicked neck for him? That's what I'm a-goin' to do, master.'

Solomon did not answer, but looked slowly round with a drawn and ashen countenance, like that of a man in mortal pain.

'Be a man, master,' said Jim, laying a rough hand gently on his shoulder, and changing utterly in voice and manner. 'Be a man, an' take it fightin'. For the Lord's sake, master, don't lay down and let it kick you.'

'Jim,' said Solomon, speaking hoarsely, 'don't think I take it easy, an' unlike a father, because I don't say nothin'.'

'God forbid!' said Jim.

'But my place,' said the showman, as if unconscious of the interruption, 'is nowhere else but here. Leastways, not now.'

He waved his hand, as though to dismiss the other from the place, and went back to his task.

'Theer was a mornin' paper here to-day,' said Jim; 'wheer is it?' After a moment's search he laid his hand upon it, and running a clumsy finger down column after column, came at last upon the shipping list, and then upon 'This Day's Departures.'

'One at nine for Rotterdam, one at half-past nine for Blown' (meaning Boulogne), 'one at ten for Queenstown, an' nothin' from the pier. Theer's time to catch 'em yet.'

He was gone, through the storm, before Solomon could find a word. The streets were cleared of people by the rain. Lightning and thunder were almost continuous, and the storm raged with a tropic fierceness. The man tore through it breathless, and never stopped until the dock was reached. He was so spent on getting there, and his own mad hurry had so foiled his purpose, that he could not speak for a minute or two. When he asked for the boat to Rotterdam, it was pointed out to him. 'There. Cleared the dock this minute.' The blinding lightning showed the boat for a fragment of a second, and the darkness ate her up again bodily, and vomited her into hideous light again, and once more shrouded her. 'The boat for Boulogne, then?' 'Here, lying close at hand,' said the oilclothed dock policeman, and, as Jim turned to get aboard, the official laid a hand upon the rain-soaked sack which covered his shoulders, and detained him.

'You're in a hurry to leave your native land, young man,' said the policeman.

'I'm in a hurry to stop somebody else from leavin' it,' panted Jim. 'Don't stop me, for the Lord's sake. It's like life an' death.'

'Robbery?' asked the policeman, still keeping that detaining hand on Jim's shoulder.

'Yes, an' worse,' said Jim.

'It ain't murder, is it?'

'I ain't so sure o' that either,' Jim replied. Even in all the agitation of his spirit he was loyal to the reputation of Sol Varley and his household, and would not, if he could help it, betray Virginia by a word. 'Theer's a cove a-goin' off by one of these here boats—I don't know which: and if I can see him I can stop him. I don't want no givin' in charge—not at present, leastways. He may have gone a'ready. Don't stop me no longer, master. It's like life an' death.'

The policeman released him, and he climbed on board the boat. The lightning was still unrolling swift sheet on sheet of flame, but the thunder was crashing and rumbling to the northwards, and no

longer spoke at the flash, but growled sullenly seconds later, and the rain had ceased as suddenly as it came. Jim thought himself alone on deck, when the dock, and the shipping, and the warehouses, and the water, and the very heavens all seemed to make a sudden leap at him in the vivid lightning, and to rush back with an awful swiftness as darkness struck light dead. The twinkling yellow lamps were nothing in the pause. Light sprang to life, and shipping, and warehouses, and heavens, and water, all leaped at him again, and again in a fragment of a second darkness struck light a fatal blow, and the twinkling yellow lamps were nothing in the pause. With the next flash an oilclothed figure sprang into being and went out again, and came along the deck as if each flash that followed drove it forward with a fiery wind. Then there was darkness for a second or two, and the twinkling lamps recovered light a little, and Jim saw the oilclothed figure near.

‘What is it, mate?’

‘Do you carry passengers?’ demanded Jim, still breathing hard, and speaking like a man foredone with haste.

‘Yes,’ said the other.

‘Is there a young man among ‘em, a gentleman, with blue eyes an’ light moustachios, with a lady, a young lady, very pretty, in a dark frock?’

His hurry was so passionate, he could scarcely speak.

‘I don’t know,’ said the seaman. ‘What about ‘em, if there is?’

‘I’ve come to stop ‘em,’ said Jim. ‘They *must* be stopped; it’s life an’ death.’

‘Have you got any authority to stop ‘em?’ asked the seaman, ‘If you have, an’ they’re aboard, I’m captain of this boat, an’ I’ll see it acted on.’

‘See if they’re here, master,’ said Jim beseechingly. ‘It’s life an’ death to more than one.’

‘Young woman bolted?’ asked the Captain.

‘Yes,’ said Jim, with wild reluctance, as though the answer were plucked out of him. ‘For the Lord’s sake, master, see if they’re here. It’s life an’ death.’

‘I can’t say whether they’re aboard or not,’ said the Captain, ‘but there is a pair as seems to answer your description. Passage booked yesterday. They’re all the passengers I have to-night—and likely to be, by the look o’ things. Come this way.’

The bows of the boat having been warped already from the wall, Jim had climbed aboard at the after-end, and the deck he stood on formed the roof of the saloon. He followed the captain

to the main deck, and peered into the saloon from the side of the steward's pantry.

'Is that the pair?' asked the Captain, with a tight grip on Jim's shoulder.

'That's the pair,' said Jim in a hoarse whisper, drawing back on deck again.

Verschoyle was leaning over little Virginia, who was crying behind her veil.

'Have you any authority to stop 'em?' asked the Captain.

'No,' said Jim. 'But, master, look here.' He waved his hands abroad pleadingly, and his voice was thick with hurry and despair. 'I've been a servant of her father's ever since I was a kid. I've left her mother swounded dead off, an' her father a-settin' by her that broken-hearted it 'd melt a stone.'

'D'ye think they're married?' asked the Captain, speaking into his brown hand lest he should be overheard.

Jim shook his head with a negative so decided that the Captain was convinced at once, and said, 'Eh, dear l' in a tone of pity. At that tone Jim took heart.

'Master,' he said, 'maybe you've got a daughter o' your own. Have a heart, master—do, for the Lord's sake, have a heart.'

'Wait here a bit,' returned the Captain. 'Here, stand there.'

All the time they talked together the lightning rolled out its sheets of flame with less and less rapidity and brilliance, and the thunder rumbled farther and farther away. And Jim, who had perhaps as much right to associate his own emotions with the elemental disturbance as the feeble gentlemen who make verses on that topic personal to themselves, felt in a vague way that with the passing of the storm and the coming of the stars hope came. He waited in silence with a beating heart.

Verschoyle and the Captain came from the saloon together.

'What have you to say to me?' asked Verschoyle in a constrained and haughty tone.

The Captain cleared his husky throat and squared his oilskinned shoulders.

'I'm a family man, sir,' he said, 'and a plain-dealin' man, and I'll come to the p'int at once. Is that young lady your wife, sir?'

'You should know better than to get drunk,' said Verschoyle, angrily amazed, 'when you have a journey before you and a ship in charge.'

'That's no answer to my question,' said the Captain. 'Are you married to that young lady?'

'What in the name of heaven is that to you?' demanded Verschoyle, with a curse thrown in.

'Well, here's a man who says you're not, and if you are—you know—you can say you are, and there's an end of it.'

'Show me the man,' said Verschoyle.

'Come here,' said the Captain aloud; and Jim stepped forward. He was still labouring for breath, and having striven to breathe softly to listen, he was breathing all the harder now. Verschoyle knew him. 'This is the man,' said the Captain. 'He says you're not. Now, I say, are you? Answer a plain question straight if you please, sir.'

'Suppose I decline to answer?'

'Then,' said the Captain bluntly, 'I refuse to carry you.'

'You are legally compelled to carry me.'

'Am I?' said the Captain, with a short laugh. 'Then I'll take the legal responsibility and you can take your legal remedy. That's all. Get your traps together. For I AM damned,' said the Captain with a mighty emphasis, 'if you travel in my boat, wherever else you travel.'

'Very good,' said Verschoyle with savage hauteur. 'You will repent this.'

'Not me,' said the master-mariner cheerfully. 'I hope you will, you——' There followed a sentence of descriptive phrases which shall rest unrecorded. The Captain had as rich and racy a vocabulary as any man who ever trod the boards of a Channel steamer, and, glowing with a comfortable glow of righteous and triumphant wrath, he flung its treasures at the retreating Verschoyle by the mouthful. All on a sudden he checked the current of his anger, and entered the saloon. Verschoyle, pale and disturbed, was speaking to Virginia. The Captain put him on one side and sat down by the girl, who was crying bitterly. Verschoyle began to rage at this, and the Captain turned upon him in grave reproof.

'What do you mean by using language like that afore a lady? I'll give you three minutes to be off my boat, young man, and if you're not off it in that time you'll leave it a good deal more swift and sudden than you'll care to.' Then, ignoring Verschoyle's presence, he took Virginia's hand between his two big palms, and addressed her, very gently: 'My pretty dear, I'm a father, and I've seen a deal of life in my time. I ain't speaking angry to you, am I? Now, you go home, and be a good gell, and a blessing to your father and mother. And don't you listen any more to that black-guard as wants to lead you astray into a foreign land, and then

throw you over and leave you broken-hearted. Go home, my pretty. That's the place for you.'

'We are going to be married in Boulogne,' sobbed Virginia.

'That's your lying game, is it?' said the Captain, rising and turning upon Verschoyle. 'Now tell her that poor yarn before a man of the world, will you? Eh? Will you? You miserable liar!'

'How dare you?' cried the girl, sobbing. 'How dare you speak so?'

'Come, Virginia,' said Verschoyle; and she arose, crying bitterly.

'I speak so,' said the Captain, 'because it's true. He won't tell *me* a lie like that. And if he does, I'll see him stick to it. I'll appeal to the Consul on the other side and see things square.' This the Captain delivered with the air of a man who clinches the nail of proof; and, turning again upon Verschoyle, demanded to know whether *that* would suit him. Virginia had raised her veil, and was looking from one to the other. 'My poor dear,' said the Captain, softening as he turned to her, 'he doesn't mean to marry you. Ask him if he does. I'm game to take you to Boulogne'—the Captain was warlike again, and directed this statement at Verschoyle—'and put you under the Consul's care till this nice young man acts fair by you. Ask him if he means it, my poor dear.'

The Captain was quite a study for an actor in the rapidity with which he changed his face and voice and manner when he looked from Verschoyle to Virginia, or from her to him.

'Ask him if he means it!' cried the Captain, thrusting his hand almost in Verschoyle's face.

The handsome rascal's face, with the lowering frown upon it, said 'No' without a word, or need of one. She read the base denial there, and burst into renewed tears, and wrung her hands, and murmured that it was cruel. Oh, it was cruel, cruel!

Moved by the sight of youth and beauty brought to such distress, the Captain turned upon Verschoyle for the last time.

'Now, then! Sharp there! One minute more, and I'll have you chucked overboard. Hi! you there!' Jim entered. 'Collar them two portmanteaus and chuck 'em ashore.' Jim seized the luggage, and would have been rejoiced to extend the order to its owner. 'Now, get out.' Verschoyle retired before the indignant Captain, mounted the ladder, crossed the saloon deck, and went ashore. Jim threw the luggage unceremoniously after him, and then, following the Captain, returned to the saloon, and, taking Virginia's hand, led her, unresisting, from the vessel.

'God bless you, master, for what you've done this night,' said Jim in taking leave of the Captain. The men were moving about the deck by this time, the mate was ordering here and there, ropes were tugging across the darkness, and the ship was quivering with the short urgent stroke of the engines.

'Take her home, and good luck to you,' said the Captain in reply, and went back to duty, and treated sea-going virtue to a stiff glass by the way.

Verschoyle summoned a hansom and drove to an hotel, feeling mean, as our trans-Atlantic cousins say. The writer feels an unfeigned joy in kicking him out of the story.

For a while poor Virginia suffered Jim to lead her, being, indeed, so broken that she scarcely knew him, or knew of anything but Verschoyle's baseness. But after a time she turned and spoke.

'Good-bye, James. Be kind to father and mother.'

'Miss Virginia,' said James, 'if you knowed how broken-artered they are, an' how glad an' willin' they'll take you home again, you'd never dream of leavin' 'em. You couldn't.'

She twined her hands together with an action which bespoke pain and shame and anger and remorse. A hundred other things were in the gesture too, and Jim, without being anything of a psychologist, read and understood them all.

'Oh, Miss Virginia,' cried honest Jim, half crying, 'have a heart. For the Lord's sake, have a heart.'

She stamped her foot, and made a downward gesture with both clenched hands.

'I won't go home,' she cried distractedly. 'I can't go home. How can you be so cruel?'

'Cruel, Miss?' said Jim. 'Whatever can I say for to persuade you? Such a head as mine,' said Jim with a distraction of aspect more than equal to her own, 'ain't fit to be trusted with a huming body. It's me, Miss—Jim. Why, you've laughed at me hundreds of times, you have. Don't you know me? Lord, I don't believe she knows me!'

Whilst he spoke she walked on rapidly and Jim followed.

'Miss Virginia,' he appealed again, 'come home to your poor father. Think of the missis, swounded dead away.'

She quickened her footsteps to a run, and Jim held on behind her appealingly all the way. Suddenly she stopped and turned upon him panting.

'I won't go home,' she said, with a sullen resolution unlike anything he had ever known of her. 'Thrown away!' she cried,

breaking into sobs and tears again, ‘deserted! Go home to be an eyesore to them! To be pitied, and scolded, and forgiven!’ Then sullenly once more, ‘I won’t go home!’

Jim’s agitation and uncertainty were pitiful. He stood and looked upon her sorrowfully, but could not find a word. Looking about her once, she faced round and walked swiftly. He followed. She stopped again.

‘I am going away,’ she said. ‘I shall never go home.’

‘Very well, Miss,’ said Jim in downright helpless desperation. ‘Where you goes I goes, an’ I’ll foller you to the world’s end.’

CHAPTER III.

SIGN of the White Horse. A chalky quadruped with very stiff legs, and apparently, if you might judge by the disturbed aspect of his mane and tail, under strong electric influences—that was the White Horse. He was woodenly electrified—if I may be allowed the phrase—on two inches of seagreen grass, and wedged very tightly into a sky of improbable blue. A slight warping of the board, due to climatic influences, had beheaded the White Horse, and the painter, as if in anticipation of that effect, had bestowed upon his countenance a backward look of feeble astonishment. Below the sign a low window, with a comfortable red blind in it. Behind the window a room, with sanded floor and sawdust-stored spittoons, and heavy tables with beery circles on them, and crossed clay pipes. About one of the tables half a dozen men, solemnly drinking and smoking, and telling ghost stories in broad daylight. The gentleman in the battered white hat and belcher tie was the proprietor of that light of nature the six-legged horse, and the employer and exhibitor of the spotted lady. The gentleman in the fur cap, the rabbit-skin waistcoat, and the red handkerchief was the owner of the swinging boats on the village green outside, as yet unpacked, and waiting for to-morrow’s fair. The seedy man in seedy black, whose skin was so curiously loose about the region of his eyes, was a professional sword-swaller. The gentleman with the red nose and bibulous eye, wherein much beer had left unquenched the light of native humour, was sole owner of Bolko’s unparalleled wax-work exhibition. The other two were showmen also, and recognisable anywhere.

Five listened whilst the red-nosed man with the bibulous eye talked.

‘Th’ on’y ghost as ever I knowed to haunt a showman was my brother Bill’s own private an’ particler property,’ the red-nosed

man was saying; ‘he was in the wax-work line afore me, like his father afore *him*, my brother Bill was, but he had a misforchin as led to his retirement.’

‘Ah!’ said the man in the rabbit-skin waistcoat, ‘what was that?’

‘He died,’ said the red-nosed man—‘scarlet fever. Leicester. Buried in the parish churchyard. Well—afore he died, mind you—he had a ghost of his own, his pardner, Joseph Turk. Reg’lar, after business hours, it was Joseph’s habit to get as drunk as he knowed how to, and simultaneous, as a man might say, my brother took him home at closin’ time. But one night, Bill he doesn’t turn up. Joseph he starts alone, an’ quite natural he falls into a clay-pit and kills hisself. Well, theer’s a inquest, theer’s Bill to give evidence, theer’s a verdick, theer’s a buryin’, and you’d ha’ thought as it was done with, wouldn’t you? My brother Bill he was a soft-’arted feelin’ sort o’ man, an’ he took on a good deal over his pardner’s death. Sittin’ by hisself on the night arter the buryin’, thinkin’ about poor Joseph, all of a sudden he feels a creepy sort of a chill come over him, an’ his eyes is drored round like to one side, an’ there he sees him, in a pair o’ cord trousers an’ a velvatin jacket an’ a billycock ’at, with a yeller handkercher with blue spots on it round his neck, which was his reg’lar wear. Well, you might ha’ knocked my brother Bill down with his father, he was that crumpled up at it. “Willy-um,” says the ghost a-speakin’ holler in his chest, like, “w’y didn’t you fetch me ‘ome,” he says, “that fatal night?” My brother Bill says nothing, he was that knocked over. “Willy-um,” says the ghost again, “it’s my intent,” he says, “for to haunt you reg’lar,” he says, “every night at twelve.” And with that he varnishes. Well, he comes next night, an’ next night, an’ next night, and my brother Bill gets that weak an’ skeered he didn’t think he’d last long. So he comes to me an’ he tells me all about it. “Why, Bill,” I says, “it’s a forchin for you.” “What d’ye mean?” he says. “Why,” I says, “exhibit him,” I says, “to any scientific speritualist as wants to see a real boner-fidy ghost,” I says. “Theer’s a mine o’ money in it.” Well, Bill he takes my advice, an’ he might ha’ died a Rothchile if Joseph hadn’t took offence at it an’ left off visitin’ of him.’

‘I can see, Mr. Bolko,’ said the seedy man in seedy black, ‘that you’re a sceptic.’

‘A what?’ asked the red-nosed man.

‘An unbeliever,’ said the other.

‘Am I?’ said the red-nosed man. ‘P’raps I am.’ He took up his pot and nodded round, ‘My respects, gentlemen.’ Then,

having emptied the vessel of its contents, he rose, and said with hoarse solemnity, ‘Them as doubts my tale can doubt it. Maybe I have my doubts about it. Never mind. But there's a moral in it—which is this: If any showman has a ghost in the family as can at all be relied upon to turn up reg'lar, theer's a pot o' money in it. Good afternoon, gentlemen.’

The sceptic departed and the five believers remained behind.

‘Comin' back,’ said the man in the rabbit-skin waistcoat, ‘to wot we wos a-talkin' about—it's my belief, look you, as Sol Varley's haunted.’

The man in seedy black said that it stood to reason.

‘Look 'ere,’ said the rabbit-skin waistcoat. ‘When did poor Sol begin to turn that pale an' queer? When did he begin to sit an' stare at nothin' for a hour at a time, an' talk when there was nobody to talk to? Why, when his gell died. When else? Why, not at all.’

‘Of course not,’ said the sword-swallower.

‘An' as for them,’ said the rabbit-skin waistcoat, ‘as talks about a gell like that havin' bolted along of Sol's man Jim, why, it's madness, ain't it? Now, I arsts anybody 'ere: Would she ha' looked at Sol's man Jim? Would she ha' spoke a civil word to him 'cept as a young lady might? I put it to you, gents. Is it likely?’ Nobody thought it likely in the least. ‘Very well, then. If you wants wrong talk about a young woman, it's allays cheap enough in the purfession an' out of it. But to talk about a young lady like that boltin' with a cove like Sol's man Jim, an' Sol pretendin' of her to be dead, why, it's enough to turn a man's drink hacid on his stomach to listen to it, ain't it?’

‘Now, *I'll* tell you something,’ said the man in the battered white hat. ‘I've sat quiet an' I've heard all sides. I didn't say nothing while Bolko was 'ere, 'cause I don't want none of 'is chaff, which he's too ready with. Gentlemen all, I've seen her!’

The four gathered near him with solemn faces.

‘Last night as ever was, I seen her,’ he said again. ‘I was leadin' out the oss for exercise—near midnight it was—an' I parst round by Sol's waggin. An', strike me dead, but I seen her face, as white as chalk, a-lookin' in at Sol's winder, an' her glides down from it without so much as touchin' a foot on the ground, an' passes me with no more noise than a bat ud make. I ain't easy frightened, but I was frightened then. But I looked arter her an' seen her melt—reg'lar melt away.’

The man's face, voice, gesture, were enough to stamp his narrative with strong reality. His bearers looked from one to the other, awe-struck, and, in spite of the broad daylight, gathered

closer. Before another word was spoken they drew their heads apart, and resumed their pipes and beer with a transparent effort to seem unconcerned.

Solomon Varley stood at the door, looking with haggard eyes from face to face. His countenance was pale and drawn, and, though his lips moved, no sound came from them. He lurched a little, like a drunken man, and set his hand to his forehead. Next, looking vacantly about him, he turned away and sought the street. The five men arose and peered after him through the bow window.

'He ain't long for this world,' said one. 'Poor old Sol!'

'No,' said another. 'He's had his call, poor Sol has—evident.'

Solomon Varley crossed the Green slowly, with downward eyes and head, noticing no man, though most looks were turned to him with sympathy or curiosity. He reached the house on wheels, which, like himself, looked less prosperous and tidy than of old, though but two months had gone by since it shone in all the splendour of new paint, and Sol himself went upright and happy. Mrs. Varley sat there in a black dress, sewing, and looked up sadly but kindly as her husband entered. Sol closed the little door, and took down a nautical-looking jacket which hung behind it. From the pocket of this garment he drew a soiled letter, which he bore to the window and read over. It had no date, and was written in a sprawling hand.

'Sir,' it ran, 'this is ritten with great grief to tell you that your daughter is dead. Before she died she told me to rite to you ; but I cannott rite, and a frend rites this for me. She told me to say that she found out befour it was too late that the man she ran away with was a villan, and left him. I am to say again, befour it was too late. Wen you see James he will tell you the same, that she left him befour it was too late. She woold have come home to you, but she was ashaymed. She is dead, and she thought you woold like to know it, because it woold ease your mind.'

'Yours truly,

'MARTHA WOOLLEY.'

'P.S. She sent all love and blessings befour she died. She praid you to forgive her, and praid for you night and day.'

The letter bore the Bristol post-mark, and had been delivered whilst Solomon was in that town. He had appealed to the police to discover the writer, and Martha Woolley was searched for, but in vain. There was some comfort in the ill-spelled letter, bitter as it was, and that comfort Solomon laid to his sore heart every hour of the day, and thanked God for it.

'What is it, Sol dear?' said his wife, rising, and putting her brown arm about his neck. 'Don't brood over it, my poor Sol, don't brood over it.'

Her eyes were thick with tears as she spoke, but she controlled them resolutely and would not let them fall.

'She's better off than livin' with a broken heart, Sol : better off,' said the mother.

'You're a good wife, my dear,' said Sol hoarsely and wearily. 'A good wife. Yes, she's better off. But it'd be somethin' if we only knowed where her grave was, my dear, wouldn't it?'

The simple question spoke of such despair to the wife's heart that her tears would have way. She drew his head to her breast and swayed it to and fro as though he were a child.

'Poor Sol, poor dear Sol! Our time ain't long, my dear. We shall soon see the poor broken-hearted thing again, Sol. If she'd come back, she'd never ha' heard a bitter word from us, Sol, would she? Never a bitter word. Never a bitter word. Never a bitter word.'

She went over the phrase again and again, as though there were comfort in it, and still held the bowed head to her wifely breast as though it were a child's.

'Such a child!' said Sol, a minute or two later, seated with heavily dependent arms between his knees, as though his hands bore a weight too great for his strength, and with eyes fixed on the floor. 'Such a child, rosy an' pretty, two months back! An' now as white as snow—as white as snow!'

'Sol!' cried his wife with a ghostly face.

'Ay,' said he, looking at her with lack-lustre eyes, 'as white as snow. As white as snow.'

'Sol!' cried his wife again.

'My darling,' said Sol, stretching out one heavy hand nervelessly and laying it on her shoulder, 'I see her poor dear dead face last night at the winder. I've seen it three nights runnin'. It's my call. You'll be lonely when I'm gone. You've been a good wife, Sarah, an' I'm grieved to leave you. But I've had the call.'

His nerveless hand dropped down again as if it held a weight too heavy for his strength. His wife knelt before him, looking in his face. A timid knock came to the door, but neither heard it. It was repeated a little louder, and Mrs. Varley, rising, opened the door with a scream.

'Don't be put out, missis,' said a voice outside. 'Might I come in? Is master theer?'

'Come in,' said Mrs. Varley faintly; and Jim entered, ragged,

shoeless, hollow-eyed, pale, bearded with a bristly beard of two months' growth—a man foredone.

'I swore,' said Jim, 'as I'd find her if I foller'd her to the world's end. I foller'd her and found her, an' she slipped me, an' I foller'd her again, and I foller'd her on, an' on, an' on.' The two looked at him with such awful faces that he paused. 'Did ye get any news of her ever?' he asked after a while. Solomon still held the letter in his hands.

'That come,' he said, 'a month ago.'

Jim spelled it through, and then, returning it to the broken and crumpled envelope, held it while he spoke.

'No more news than this?'

'Never a word,' said Solomon.

'Did you find where she was buried, master?' Sol shook his head.

'We tried,' said Mrs. Varley, 'everywhere. But the letter didn't even tell us where she died.'

'Master,' said Jim, 'I've walked a matter of a thousand mile. I'm dead beat. If you please, missis, I should like the things I left. I'm very bad off for a change.'

Mrs. Varley poured out a can of water into a washing basin, set out soap and towels and a comb, then produced a bundle of clothes from a locker.

'You can get a wash, James, and a change,' she said, crying silently the while, 'and I'll get you something to eat.'

Saying this, she left the house, and Jim, laying down the letter, began with laboured slowness to divest himself of a very tattered shirt. He paused suddenly in the act of drawing it over his head.

'What's this I hears about a ghost, master?' Solomon started and stared at him. 'I meets Tom Hackett twelve mile behind, an' he says you've seen a ghost, he says. That's what he says. "Your master's haunted."'

Solomon rose with outstretched hands.

'Has anybody seen it besides me?'

'Have you seen it, master?' cried Jim, slipping the garment back again.

'Three times,' said Solomon with awe-struck face.

'When?' cried Jim. 'Where?'

'Allays at midnight,' answered Solomon, 'at that little winder,—pale, an' thin, an' white—as white as snow.'

'When? when?' cried Jim again. 'Last night?'

'Yes,' said Solomon, 'last night. For the third time. It's

my call, Jim. I sba'n't be here much longer. I shall foller my poor broken-hearted child.'

'What?' cried Jim, in a voice which would have been a roar but for his feebleness. 'You've seen her three times, an' never spoke to her?' Solomon could only look at him in grief-struck wonder. 'Why, I found out the gell as wrote this letter. Sewed boot-uppers for a livin', she did. Her it was what fired the bullet. But who makes it, do you think? Who makes it, master?'

'Jim,' said Solomon, trembling from head to foot, 'Jim!' —warning and entreaty mingled in the tone.

'Master,' says Jim, 'if what I says ain't true, you take a pitch-fork out of the waggin outside and run me through with it. I finds the gell as wrote this letter. What makes me find her? 'Cos I'm travellin' to search for Miss Virginia, and 'cos I've swore as sure as Heaven an' earth I'll foller her to the world's end. Miss Virginia had been a-livin' with her, an' one day her says to her: "A dear friend o' mine is dead. I can't write." Her says, "You write for me an' I'll tell you what to say." And then her writes this letter. Then Miss Virginia ketches sight o' me, an' runs away again. Was a-makin' petticuts at the time, an' livin' very hard, but quite respectable. On I follers—tracks her—loses her—finds her—loses her—tracks her again, an' follers on again.'

Solomon was on his knees, and the tears were dripping through his fingers, dripping thickly on the floor.

'Such a face, Jim!' he moaned; 'that wild an' worn an' pale! Oh, Virgie! Virgie!'

'Master,' said Jim, 'I've had word of her all along. Now her's took rail, an' I've had to walk; an' now her's slipped me, but I've took up the track again, an' at last we've found her.'

The tears were coursing down Jim's face too, and washing out brown channels in the grey dust which covered it.

'Not a word to the missis, not a word,' said Jim. 'Her'll come again to-night to look at you. That's it,' said the valiant, tender-hearted scarecrow, shaking with his sobs, 'poor bleedin' heart! Just wants to see you, like, as often as her fear 'll let her.'

'May I come in?' said Mrs. Varley, tapping at the door.

'Not yet, ma'am, if you please,' said Jim, bolting the door with great haste; and, still sobbing and crying, he proceeded to his ablutions, and having conquered his tears and changed his dress, and again and again warned his master to silence, he admitted Mrs. Varley and sat down to a prodigious meal under the shade of the house outside.

Solomon went feverishly to work to help the men who were

arranging the vans and putting up the canvas in readiness for the morrow, and Jim kept sedulously out of Mrs. Varley's way. Before nightfall he limped away, unrecognised by any of his ancient comrades, whom he had dodged all afternoon like a stage villain, unintentionally inviting inspection.

The night grew, and Solomon sat with a wildly beating heart in the little house on wheels. Mrs. Varley had retired to the bedroom partitioned off at one end of the structure, and there, by the light of a little lamp, spelled through the Psalms in her Prayer-book. Many and many a line she went through half mechanically, and the words had no meaning for her. At length the slow forefinger, rough with the needle, paused at these words, ‘As for me, I am poor and in misery : haste Thee unto me, O God.’ She bowed her head and wept above the line. And what was that? A cry outside that thrilled her to the soul—an answering voice within which called her child by name—the noise of a door that opened suddenly—the voice again that called her child by name. Hurrying to the main chamber of the house on wheels, she saw Jim beyond the open door with a drooping figure in his arms. But it was her husband’s voice which called upon her child—it was her child and his who lay worn and pallid, but alive, in those protecting arms.

Solomon Varley that night retired from business. In the next week’s *Era* his unrivalled zoological collection was advertised, and in a week it had passed to other hands.

Little Virgie’s cheeks are abloom again long since, and little Virgie is a happy wife and mother. I could transport myself by train and road in four hours and a half to that quiet spot in Worcestershire in which Sol Varley and his wife enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* of their simple lives. I know a well-to-do jobmaster in a neighbouring town who answers to the name of Jim, and has been given up by all the eligible women in his own station of life for four miles round as an incorrigible bachelor; and sometimes in Regent-street or Piccadilly I meet a handsome and distinguished-looking man, who limps a little in his gait from an ill-set broken leg, the result of an encounter with that same jobmaster when the two met together by accident about a year after the events related in this story. Most of Mr. Verschoyle’s friends are under the impression that he received this injury whilst out hunting. Jim hearing this once on a time nodded sternly, and remarked, with a look of enigma on him, that it happened a year after the hunt was over; and being pressed for information, he declined to say another word.

The Man with Two Souls.

CHAPTER I.

IT was nine o'clock on an April evening, the end of one of my evenings on duty in the library of the London Institution. A porter had come to turn out the gas, and had brought with him my share of the last postal delivery—a second-hand book-list and a letter. The letter was addressed in a man's hand, but in the corner was the word *Immediate*, underlined, in what was clearly a lady's hand. It ran thus:—

‘G. W. R. Hotel, Paddington, Tuesday.

‘DEAR NICHOLSON,—I suppose you've forgotten my very existence, and so I'll begin by saying that I came up to John's just before you went down, and that I knew Heath of Brasenose. Perhaps you may remember my dining with you in Trinity one night, and our going to Madame Pack's afterwards.

‘Your surprise at hearing from me will be nothing to your surprise at my asking if you can look me up to-night. I ought of course to come and see you, but I only got to town from North Wales this afternoon, am off to Oxford to-morrow morning, and feel so tired that I cannot bring myself to stir out of my room. I want to see you particularly, so forgive my asking you to come at such short notice and so late.

‘Yours very truly,

‘FRANK S. ANSTIE.’

I should probably not have remembered Anstie but for his reminder. My friend Heath had taken a professorship out in Japan, and before leaving Oxford had asked me to call on an old fag of his, named Anstie, who was coming up to John's. Almost immediately after doing so I had gone down myself, and Anstie had dropped quite out of my memory. But I remembered him now—a pleasant young fellow with a thoughtful, dreamy-looking face—and I remembered our going to Madame Pack's together. What he should have so particularly to say to me, and why he couldn't write it or at least give me some inkling of it in his letter, puzzled me. But, whatever it might be, I must go; so I got into the Underground at Moorgate Street.

In the train I tried to recall all the details of our short acquaintance, but my mind was a blank as to anything except that

visit to Madame Pack's. Madame Pack was a lady who came to Oxford once every year and gave exhibitions of mesmerism and electro-biology. These arts have been thoroughly investigated long ago, and we know their limits—we know that much of the power once claimed for them was purely imaginary. But we know just as certainly that a large fraction of ordinary men and women can be put in an abnormal state by the simplest and most harmless means, and that in this state a smaller, but still appreciable, fraction can be made by the mere assertions of the operator to believe or do the greatest absurdities, to undergo the most complete illusions of their senses, to lose all feeling of pain, and to experience at one moment a paralysis of muscular power, at another a remarkable increase of it. Madame Pack was no mean proficient in inducing such phenomena, and her proficience was much assisted by her *physique*: tall, dark, and handsome, she was ordinarily pleasant-looking enough, but, when needful, she would throw into her looks and gestures an imperiousness which fascinated an impressionable 'subject' as a snake fascinates its prey.

The stopping of the train at Praed Street put an end to the recollections of Madame Pack with which I had beguiled the time, and in a couple of minutes I was being shown into Anstie's sitting-room. I found him alone, lying on a sofa, and as he rose and shook hands I was painfully struck by the change in him; he seemed the mere shadow of himself. 'I'm sorry to find you done up,' I said; 'you're not looking well.' 'Oh,' he replied, 'but for weakness, I never felt better; but I had an illness last year from which I've not quite recovered yet, and a little thing like an eight hours' journey is apt to knock me up.'

After handing me a cigar and ordering coffee, he said, 'I don't think I've met you since that night we saw Madame Pack—I know you went down a few days afterwards. You'll be surprised to hear that I asked you to take the trouble of coming here, and at this hour, to inform you of some experiences of my own arising out of mesmerism. I won't apologise, however, because when you've heard what I've got to say, you'll feel—whatever you may think of my sanity or veracity—that the strangeness of it has sufficiently repaid your trouble. But I can only tell it on condition that while I'm alive you won't give a hint about it to any one else. You needn't be afraid I'm asking you to share the knowledge of anything discreditable to me or to anybody; and, if I die, you're perfectly free to do as you like.'

'My dear Anstie,' I replied, 'you may count on me to observe the condition most rigidly. But, if the matter's so serious as you seem to make it, haven't you told any one else? and, if not, is it right that I should be your sole confidant?'

‘Why,’ said Anstie, ‘I can’t tell any relative because I’ve none to tell. I was the only child of only children; my parents were carried off by yellow fever in Jamaica when I was a baby; and the grandfather who brought me up died a year before I went to Oxford. And, although there are of course many men whom I know better than I know you, and who know me better than you do, I’ve got good reasons for speaking to you rather than to any of them. In the first place, none of them, to my knowledge, take the slightest interest in mesmeric phenomena, or, for aught I know, regard them as anything but the most trivial imposture. In the second place, I’d rather not commit my experiences to a friend who’d be often seeing me and as often arguing with me about them. And, though I wish some one to know them in case of my death, there isn’t really the least reason why they should be known till then to more than one person. So let me fill your cup again, and I’ll begin.’

CHAPTER II.

‘The next night after going with you to see Madame Pack, I went again, and offered myself as a ‘subject,’ but during repeated trials she could produce no effect on me at all. Afterwards I stopped behind with a few other men to talk to her, and, on her saying that people who were hard to mesmerise could generally mesmerise others, it occurred to me what horrid fun one would be able to make at Christmas parties and that sort of affair if one could mesmerise like Madame Pack.

‘There was a man on my staircase at John’s who was one of her easiest subjects. I went to two more of her *séances* and watched the minutest details of her procedure; then I got this man to let me try to mesmerise him. I found I could do anything I liked with him. In the next year or so I managed to try my hand on one or two men who had only been slightly influenced by Madame Pack, and convinced myself that practice would make me quite her equal.

‘Now I come to the end of last summer term. I was just rejoicing over a First in Mods. when one of our dons came to me to know if I should like to do some coaching in the Long. He’d been asked to recommend some one to read three hours a day for three months with a man who was coming up to John’s in October. The coin was to be fifty guineas; small but pleasant family; good river for fishing, punting, or bathing; and near the finest scenery in North Wales.

‘Well, all my income, bar my scholarship, came from a share in a Jamaica plantation, and the plantation had done badly for

the last year or two. Whatever had been saved up by my grandfather out of former years, together with the money he left me, had been invested for me, and I couldn't touch it till I came of age, which was not till a month ago. I was looking forward with a good deal of awkwardness to having to ask his executors for a loan, when this offer came, and I took it like a shot.

‘The place was near a town called Llanrwst——’

‘Oh,’ said I, ‘don’t say a town called Llanrwst; why, two of the happiest years of my boyhood were spent as a day-boy at Llanrwst Grammar School.’

‘Well,’ said Anstie, ‘that *is* odd! Perhaps you know the family? their name was Evans, and the house was called Plas Newydd.’

‘I knew them well,’ I replied. ‘There was Mr. Evans, a retired clergyman of about fifty; his wife, a sweet-mannered woman, who used to play and paint very nicely—at least, so I thought; there was a pretty but very shy little girl of six or seven; and there was a youngster of about the same age who used to live with them, and was going to the school when he was older.’

‘He was my “pup,”’ said Anstie. ‘His name was Meredith, and he was a ward of Mr. Evans’s. He didn’t care a cent for anything except fishing, and he’d only just scraped through matric. at John’s. His guardian was afraid he’d be ploughed for Smalls unless he’d some one to coach him in his subjects before going up to Oxford, and that was how I came there.

‘Mrs. Evans had died of heart-disease some years before. Your pretty, shy little girl of six or seven was a pretty, shy girl of eighteen, with her mother’s manner and accomplishments. She was a great reader, too, and, when she got over her shyness with one, it was surprising to find a girl in those outlandish parts who could talk about so many books, and talk so well about them.

‘Well, my mornings were religiously spent in coaching Mere-dith. I’m bound to say he stuck to the work well, and when he went up for Smalls at Christmas he was *not* ploughed—I hope he’ll get through Mods. as comfortably. The rest of the day, he and I were free to do as we chose. I didn’t fish—I hate killing things. So I used to go rambling about the mountains or play croquet with Violet Evans. Meredith would do the civil a bit at first by keeping me company, but finding I could get on very well without him he soon dropped back to his fishing.

‘The result was, that I was thrown more and more with Violet Evans. Her father had gout, and went out very little; there were next to no girls of her own station and tastes living near, so that she’d hardly any companions; and both he and she were glad for

me to go walks with her to the Grey Mare's Tail, or Trefriw, or Llyn y parc, or Bettws.

'Of course you can guess what followed. I didn't mean to say anything till the three months were over, but it came out before half that time. We were sitting one afternoon in the garden, which was on a higher level than the house, and hidden from it by tall trellis-work covered with creepers. I was a worshipper of William Morris, and had brought his poems with me: she'd never read any of them before, but was beginning to be as fascinated with them as I was. That afternoon I was reading to her from the exquisite episode in the fourth book of Jason which describes the loss of Hylas. I dare say you know that wonderful song beginning—

I know a little garden close
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.'

I nodded.

'And those later lines in it,—

Unto the place for which I cry.
For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
That maketh me both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.

'Well, I couldn't help reading that song as I myself felt it, and I did feel it very genuinely. I know I hardly got through it, and when I had got through it I felt unable to read a line further. I looked up, meaning to make some excuse for stopping there, and then I saw Violet colouring and with her eyes on the ground. I never met any one so extraordinarily sensitive to other people's thoughts, but I don't fancy it needed much sensitiveness to tell what was in mine; anyhow, I saw she knew. There was no good putting it off; I held out my hand and said, "Violet, this is the little garden close; must that be my cry, or, when you cease to tread it, will you come with me?" She got up and said, "I do not feel well now; I think I will go in; but I will come with you, Frank." And she put her hand in mine.'

And Anstie burst into tears.

CHAPTER III.

'I'm ashamed of being such a baby,' he said after a time, 'but I'm not strong now, and a little thing upsets me; there was really nothing melancholy in it;' and he smiled.

'I spoke to her father that night. He said he hadn't known me very long; still, he'd seen a good deal of me, and liked me. I'd done well enough already at Oxford to show I'd an intention and reasonable prospect of getting on. He should be a very lonely old man without his daughter, but he oughtn't to let his own happiness stand in the way of hers, and perhaps he might be able to live somewhere near her. So he was willing to recognise an engagement, and to give her to me as soon as I'd taken my B.A. and was making a regular income. You can understand how happily the days passed after that.'

'One afternoon we two were walking in Llanrwst, and saw a poster announcing the arrival of Signor Giacomo Fiori, "Professor of Mesmerism and Electro-biology." Violet said she'd never understood what that word electro-biology meant. I explained that it was used by persons like Signor Fiori to signify those phenomena which they professed to induce in people by the communication of an electric current. And so began a conversation in which I described to her everything I'd seen or done in the way of mesmerism.'

'The next afternoon we were sitting under the shades of Nant-y-glyn, when she said, "Frank, I wonder if you could mesmerise *me*? I should like to know how it feels, but I shouldn't like you to make me do anything ridiculous." "No more should I, Vi," I answered; "I should think it profanation. Let me try and put you in the mesmeric state, and get you to talk about things and so on, and then 'wake' you and see if you remember them."

'I never had an easier subject; she went off almost at once. I made but one experiment on her. I fancied I'd noticed her learning that little song which showed us each other's hearts, and now, on my asking her to repeat it, she gave it with the most exquisite tenderness. I "woke" her and told her; she hadn't the faintest recollection, and said it was a great shame to find out her secrets in that way. As for the "going to sleep," it was very pleasant, but I mustn't tell her father, or he might be afraid of its exciting her heart, which was weak, like her mother's. Of course it did not excite her—quite the contrary—but he might be afraid.

'Well, she let me mesmerise her many times after that, on the condition that I was not to make her tell secrets. I used instead to get her to sing Welsh songs to me, but a very remarkable thing occurred which was opposed to all my mesmeric experience. You know that the more rapid the influence of the mesmerist over the subject, the more complete that influence is?'

'Certainly.'

'And the oftener the influence is exercised, the more complete it is?'

'Certainly.'

'Now, with her it was just the other way. The oftener I mesmerised her, the less time it took, but the less was I able to do anything further. At last I found it impossible to get her to sing or even to speak in that state, and it became less and less easy to wake her.'

'One day we started early for a long walk over the mountains to Llyn Geirionydd. That, you know, is a tiring walk for a lady. As we came back along the Pen-craig stream that makes the Grey Mare's Tail, we sat down by the water's edge. "Frank," she said, "I feel so tired. Send me to sleep for a minute or two, and it'll rest me."

'I mesmerised her, and in a few minutes set about waking her. I couldn't. I tried for several minutes, and then got alarmed. I put my hand on her pulse and couldn't feel it. I dashed her face with water from the stream, and still I couldn't feel it. I rushed to the forester's cottage above the waterfall, and brought back a woman with some brandy. Then I tore down the mountain into Llanwrst to the nearest doctor.'

'I found him in, and told him everything breathlessly. He said he'd follow on his horse in a minute or two with all that was necessary. Meanwhile, if I got back first, I was to do all I could to keep up warmth and restore respiration.'

'I found her in just the same state; he reached us a few seconds later, and exerted every means that he knew of. I begged him to tell me that she was not dead. "I'll tell you everything in good time," he said. Presently he rose from his knees. "Are you sure," I said, "that I can't wake her if I try again and try long enough?" "I know the mesmeric state well," he answered; "do your best to bear it, Anstie. There is One who will wake her some day, and you'll be happier with her then than you even were an hour ago."

And Anstie, who had for some time been speaking under the most painfully evident self-control, broke down utterly.

CHAPTER IV.

'My only recollections,' he said presently, 'for a long time after that are those of delirium. The scene was almost always the Clarendon Rooms at Oxford, with Madame Pack on the platform surrounded by a number of mesmerised subjects. Among them was Violet, and I kept calling out, "You've killed her; you can never

wake her ; I must fetch Dr. Jones." Then I would rush down thousands of stairs to fetch him, always relapsing into unconsciousness before I could reach the bottom, except once, when Mr. Evans met me at the foot and said, "I'm going to fetch my little girl, Frank." "Yes," I said, "go up to her ; it's very high, but she can't come down to you."

"At last came a time when I heard a voice say, "All the symptoms seem much better this morning," and I recognised bending over me the faces of Dr. Jones and Mr. Evans. Then I remembered and said, "Oh, Dr. Jones, she never woke, or she'd be here ;" and while the tears rolled down her father's face the doctor replied, "Perhaps she is here, my dear boy, though we can't see her. But you shall talk to us by-and-by ; you must drink this, and go to sleep now."

"When I woke, they were there again, and told me I'd been ill a long time with congestion of the brain. I asked them to bring me Violet's portrait, and her paintings and songs and books. "My lad," said Dr. Jones, "you'll make yourself worse again if we let you have them yet ; wait a little." "Doctor," I said, "you'll make me worse again if you don't let me have them. Bring them to me, and I shall be quiet." He brought them, and I was right.

"The first time I was able to see him alone, I asked if the mesmerism had anything to do with her death. He replied that the cause of death was simply failure of the heart's action, which mesmerism would neither induce nor aggravate. Her circulation was so weak that the walk to and from Llyn Geirionydd was quite enough to account for this failure, and her request to be mesmerised was a sign of that drowsiness which accompanies a slowly dying heart. I must not dream of reproaching myself with having in any way hastened her death ; she had proposed the walk herself, and, if any one was to blame, it was he, for not having put the most rigid limits on her love of exercise.

"I asked if Mr. Evans knew anything about the mesmerism. "I didn't tell him at first," he answered ; "but lately he said he was quite satisfied from your wanderings that you had been mesmerising Violet, and he wished to know if that had anything to do with the failure of the heart. I thought it best then to tell him, and disabuse his mind of any such suspicion, and you may rest quite assured that he entertains none."

"As soon as I was fit to be driven out, I was taken, at my earnest entreaty, to see where she lay. It was not at Llanrwst, but in the little churchyard of Llanrhychwyn, up the very mountain where she died. Her father had once held the cure of it, and her mother was buried there. Her own grave was separate, and the

headstone was not yet put up. I begged that it might have that text, "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth;" and her father, doubtless guessing why I'd chosen it, agreed.

"By the time I'd recovered strength at all appreciably, the October term had begun. I didn't in the least want to go back to Oxford for a long while, but, holding a scholarship, I had a duty to my college which I felt bound not to shirk. Dr. Jones, however, wouldn't hear of my returning to work yet, so I sent a certificate from him to the President, who at once gave me leave to stay down till I was fit to begin my Greats reading. Meredith went up to John's at the same time, and naturally enough told people there what he knew. Luckily, he didn't know anything about the mesmerism.

"But, though I wasn't to be allowed to go back to college work, Dr. Jones strongly urged me to seek entire change of scene. "I don't wish," he said, "to diminish one whit the hold of this affection on you, but affection is one thing and morbid brooding another; and this morbid brooding is preying through your mind on your body, and seriously delaying the restoration of your strength. Remember, Anstie, that the duty of life calls you—the duty of making the best of your abilities for the general good—and that you will at the same time be most truly reverencing her by seeking to fulfil what you know would have been her ideal. Go to the sea—Llandudno—and get fresh tone for your mind and body together." And so I went to the sea; but I wouldn't go to Llandudno, because I should have seen too many people there (though I believe that was his reason for recommending it). I went, instead, to Colwyn Bay.

"I hadn't been there long before I felt curious mental sensations. I shouldn't have known quite how to describe them then, but I feel now that they were like struggles of a mind trying to express itself: and yet my power of thinking did not at other moments seem in the least impaired. And a marked feature in connexion with these sensations was that they recurred whenever I was grieving over Violet's death, and seemed to exercise an influence contrary to my own feelings. At last they came to be accompanied with positive thoughts—thoughts independent of my own, and taking the form of messages of comfort and happiness from my betrothed. Have you any idea now what I'm going to confide to your unbelief?"

"Yes," I said; "you're going to tell me that these sensations were the workings of her spirit visiting you from time to time."

"I'm going to tell you something far more wonderful than that.

I tell you that these were the workings of her spirit, not visiting me from time to time, but actually dwelling with mine in one body from the time when her own body passed from that mesmeric sleep into death.

' When these messages came to me, I doubted them at first for workings of my own mind ; but their persistency soon forced me to admit the happy truth. And the time has long passed since these expressions of this second mind were limited to mere messages ; they are now thoughts of the same variety and complexity as my own, but always separate from my own, and often differing from them.

' It's perfectly possible that all other cases of mesmerism known to you or me may find their explanation in the common scientific theory ; certainly, I never saw the slightest evidence that the minds of any of Madame Pack's subjects were in direct *rappoport* with her own. But there's this marked difference between those cases and Violet's, as I've already pointed out, that, while my mesmeric *power* over her increased, my mesmeric *control* over her disappeared ; she used to become as one dead, and the reason was that her mind was for the time attracted out of her body into that of the mesmeriser.

' And now consider the circumstances of her death. I've said that the walk was a tiring one for a lady, and I've told you that Dr. Jones regarded it as quite sufficient in her case to account for the failure of the heart's action. But she'd been that same walk many times before, and her health and spirits were never better than on that last day. The reason why the heart's action failed was simply that, when I mesmerised her, the energising and sustaining mind was attracted from her body into mine.

' Then the sojourn of her soul with mine became permanent ; there was no living tenement to receive it back. For long after that, however, it lay inactive ; the new machinery at its disposal for mental operations was strange to it, perhaps one might also say that it was strange to the machinery, that each had to become accustomed to the other. Then came perception and the power of active thought—a power first used to convey to me those glad messages, and afterwards for every purpose to which your thought or mine works.

' I cannot possibly describe to you how happy my life has become. To have been united with her as marriage unites would have been happiness indeed ; but to dwell in one frame, to feel every pleasure and every pain together, to know each other's every thought—surely from the beginning of the world no man has been so happy as this. And how can I speak of the influence on

myself? How could so close an influence fail to mould what was worse in me more like to that which was better in her?"

He stopped for a moment, and then said, "I've told you all this without giving you the chance of making one single remark on it. I can't expect you to believe, so do not feel embarrassed about saying whatever's in your mind."

"My dear Anstie," I said, "I've listened to you throughout with all possible sympathy."

"Yes," he said, "I saw that, or I shouldn't have told you nearly all that I have. But you were going to say something more."

"I suppose you share every reminiscence of your betrothed, that you know every trivial incident in her past life?"

"I appreciate," he answered, smiling, "the delicacy with which you disguise a challenge. My dear Nicholson, is not every reminiscence a treasure brought out of a brain-cell in which it has been deposited and preserved? And were not the brain-cells from which alone my Violet could draw these reminiscences laid underneath the turf in Llanrhychwyn churchyard? How, then, should I know more of her past life than I did before?"

"But," I said, "if she has no memory independent of yours, how came she to recollect her own identity, and to give you the messages of which you spoke?"

"The answer is," he replied after a pause, "that she did not recollect it, but, being conscious of all my memories and thoughts of her, she identified herself by inference with the object of them."

"In fact," I said—and I could not help smiling—"if you admit the possibility of her drawing a wrong inference, she may be some one else, and not your Violet at all?"

"Well," he said, with a laugh, "that never occurred to either of us; doubtless it might be so, but I don't suppose you press the alternative?"

"No," I replied, "but I'm going to press something else. The word *Immediate* outside your letter was written in a lady's hand; was that her writing?"

"Yes; it was an afterthought of hers."

"Very well. Now, if you are self-deceived, it is natural that you should write thoughts which you attribute to her in a hand like hers. But, if not, how comes she to write a different hand from you?"

"My dear Nicholson," he said, "she might of course write in my hand, and, physiologically speaking, that would be the more natural thing to do. But she likes to recover as much of her old self as possible, to read again the books that used to be hers,

to learn again her painting and playing, and in the same way to write her old hand.'

'I see I must give that up, then. Tell me, however, can you two think different thoughts simultaneously?'

'No,' he said; 'if I am thinking, Violet has to wait, and *vice versa*. Perhaps we may improve on that; you know it was a goodish time before telegraphists could send two messages along a wire at once. But surely you don't *expect* the organisation which was meant for the purposes of one mind to do double duty?'

'But,' I said, 'in a way you're making it do double duty. You have only one mental organisation for the work of two minds; those minds can't work simultaneously, they must work consecutively. As a consequence, the mental organisation gets, I presume, next to no rest in waking hours; from waking to sleeping, it must always be at high tension. Is not this very wearing?'

'Undoubtedly,' he replied. 'We try to give a proportionately longer time for rest in sleep. I wish I could feel, however, that our bodily strength was not diminishing. I've seen Dr. Jones repeatedly; in fact, I've been staying at Plas Newydd for weeks past. He shakes his head and says I'm killing myself by what he calls my morbid brooding; it's quite useless to tell him that I don't brood, and that I'm perfectly happy. That is the only thing that troubles me or her; it's hard that such a life as ours should be cut off so young. And yet we shall be happier in our death, whenever we do die, than any lovers since the world began; we shall die literally in the selfsame breath, and, while we know from our own experience that the soul does *not* die with the body, we feel that, whatever the destiny of our souls may be, they are in any case not likely to be separated.'

'I'm going to Oxford now. I don't feel much up to reading for Greats, and, if I find I can't, I shall resign my scholarship. But I love the old place, and I want her to know it; of course she shares my reminiscences of it, but memory is not the same as sight.'

'I should like,' said I, 'before going, to tell you my conviction as to the origin of your belief, if I can do so without paining you. If I didn't think that it was fatally undermining your health, I should hesitate to say anything which might disturb a belief so beautiful and so happy; but, as it is, I feel I've a duty to fulfil, if you'll allow me to fulfil it.'

'Most certainly; it 'll interest me to hear what you say, and in any case I owe this much, at least—very much more—in return for your attention and sympathy.'

'Many thanks; then, I'll begin at the beginning. You've admitted that the phenomena presented by Miss Evans in her

trances were at first purely mesmeric, that the change was gradual, and that the means employed were mesmeric throughout. There's a continuity in all this which forbids me to suppose that the later phenomena differed generically from the earlier. And the number of the mesmeric cases known to you and me is so infinitesimally small compared with the total number of such cases, that to assume that the later phenomena were singular at all is a very rash inference. Granted, however, that they were unique, it is immeasurably more probable that they were due to some peculiarity of her physical organisation, than that either by mesmeric or any other means a soul can be attracted out of its own body into that of another person.

' As to the circumstances of her death, it may be quite true that she was never in better health or spirits, and that she had gone that same tiring walk often before. Yet, how many little things would account for her being more exhausted after it! She may have walked quicker with you, may have taken rougher and steeper paths, may have rested less on the way, or may have gone longer without the sustenance of food. How much more natural to explain the stoppage of the heart by any one of these simple hypotheses !

' As for those first sensations of yours at Colwyn Bay, it would be strange if, in your state of mind and with a nervous system impaired by congestion of the brain, you had *not* had curious sensations of the brain sometimes ; and it was only natural that those sensations should recur whenever you were most melancholy. The first active thoughts which you attribute to her mind thinking within you were nothing more than, as you yourself at first suspected, the workings of your own mind. I dare say every one occasionally has thoughts which take the form of remarks addressed to himself ; I know I have. Probably that indicates a little temporary twist or rick in one's mind ; and the persistency with which thoughts of this form recurred to you, instead of convincing you that they were not your own thoughts, ought to have convinced you that your mind was not in good working order. Lastly, when once you were possessed by this idea, it was inevitable that you should go on personating your betrothed in your thoughts, thinking as she whenever you were not thinking as yourself. And this perpetual tension of the mind, acting on a system which has never been restored from the effects of that illness, must wear you out sooner or later.

' Now, I entreat you to believe that, in what I'm going to advise you to do, I am not for one moment throwing a suspicion on your sanity. Your conviction has been deduced in perfectly sane

fashion, partly from phenomena internal to your own mind, and partly from external phenomena ; the reality of both sets of phenomena is beyond dispute, and you have merely mistaken their import. Go to some first-rate mental doctor—Maudsley, for instance ; tell him everything you have told me, and do as he bids you.'

'I thank you very much for the advice,' he answered, 'and I fully appreciate the force of your arguments against the truth of my conviction. I haven't a doubt in the world that any unprejudiced person whom we might choose as umpire would decide for you—but only because the internal evidence must be *felt*, and no one but myself can feel it. I can't go to Maudsley or any one else, because he would most assuredly treat me on the theory that I was deluded. Grant for argument's sake that I am *not* deluded, tell me how it would be possible for me to prove that to him, and I might consider about taking your advice.'

I thought for a little time, and then admitted that I saw no such means of proof open to Anstie. 'But,' I said, 'supposing for argument's sake that you *are* deluded, *he* might prove *that* to you by the simplest means—by a treatment which would lessen the pressure of blood on the brain, and soothe its over-activity, and which would at least relax the unbearable mental strain from which you are suffering.'

'For that matter, then,' Anstie replied, 'he would only treat me as I've already been treated by Dr. Jones, whose prescriptions I'm still faithfully following—and nothing would be gained by going to him. And I could not possibly submit myself to be treated for the purpose of proving myself deluded. It would be a sin against *her*, to doubt her after all these months ; and, even if I *were* deluded, I would rather die in the delusion than live without it. Make yourself easy, however, by considering that, if you are right, Dr. Jones's treatment and the variety of Oxford life ought to work my cure.'

'Well,' I said, rising, 'this talk must have been very trying to you, and I'll not prolong it. Will you write me a bit of 'Varsity news now and then, and tell me how you are ?'

'Most gladly.'

'And, by the way, have you told Mr. Evans nothing of this ?'

'How could I ? He would no more have believed me than any one else will ; and to him it would have been intolerable mockery to be told that his dead daughter was looking at him from my eyes, listening to him through my ears, speaking to him with my lips. He would have hated the sight of me. Oh, Nicholson, you cannot conceive the trial that it was to her to be with him again, and never to dare to tell him ! Ah, well, good-bye.'

'Good-bye, old fellow.'

'Good-bye.'

I had left the room, and he called me back. 'Did you not hear the second good-bye? You knew her once.'

I said good-bye again as best I could, and hurried downstairs, hardly able to see the steps for the tears in my eyes.

CHAPTER V.

SCARCELY a fortnight had passed before I received this telegram from the President of St. John's:—'I am grieved to say Mr. Anstie died this morning. He has named you one of his executors, and, as he wished to be buried in North Wales, it is desirable that you should come to Oxford at once to make arrangements. I have telegraphed to same effect to your co-executor, Rev. Joseph Evans, Plas Newydd, Llanrwst.'

On reaching Oxford I found that Anstie had broken a blood-vessel. Had he been in fairly good health, it was said, he might have recovered, but his system was too low to give him a chance of rallying. Every one spoke of him with the keenest regret. Those about him had been much struck with his anxiety to be left to himself when he knew that his recovery was improbable. He had passed away quite quietly, and the perfect happiness of his dead face told me that up to the very end no shadow of doubt had crossed his beautiful dream.

His will left his entire property to Mr. Evans, except a few legacies and remembrances to myself and other friends. It begged that he might be buried at Llanrhychwyn, 'in the grave where lies the earthly part of my betrothed wife, Violet Evans,' and that on the stone might be cut the words, 'In their death they were not divided.'

We laid him where he wished, and his grave and hers has over it the fuller text, 'Lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.'

I told Mr. Evans everything. He said that he had come to love Anstie as his own son, and that his feelings towards him would only be deepened—but he was glad that Anstie himself had not told him.

And after Anstie's death the wifeless and childless old clergyman had nothing to bind him to life. Even his ward Meredith had been called away to take possession of a sheep farm left him by an Australian kinsman. In that little churchyard up the mountain sleeps with his dear ones the only being for whose sake it was needful to keep from others the strange and touching story of poor Frank Anstie.

The Violin's Voice.

THE Dark Angel of Death was standing outside the musician's door, for little Anita, Maestro Narditti's child, was fading away : no tears, no prayers could avail, not even Carissima's lovely voice.

Carissima's voice was hushed now ; the Maestro had no heart to take up his dearly-loved violin and play to soothe his sorrow, as he had done many years ago when his wife died and left this little one behind.

Heaven had given him the divine gift of genius and had bidden him call aloud to the world. So Carissima and he had played together through sickness and sorrow and success, and through all the changing scenes of life they had been faithful friends.

They had just come back from the crowded hall : the people said that never before had the Maestro played so beautifully, and that never before had the violin's voice sounded so mournful and pathetic.

Well, you see, they did not know the reason, but we do, for both were thinking of the little dying girl, and how could their thoughts be anything but sorrowful, or the outward expression of those thoughts be anything but mournful ?

The father was weeping by his child's bedside. But she said : 'Do not weep, sing to me—sing me to sleep, for I am so weary, dear father, and the evening has been so long without thee.'

Then he rose and he played to her, and she closed her eyes and listened happily to Carissima's voice. It sang a song without words—the music alone told the tale—of a pure young life, too-pure for earth, and therefore to be taken away to that Fair Land where only the good and pure and true dwell. Yet it was hard to leave the earth, harder still to leave the dear ones behind, and to know that they would be desolate ; and here the violin's voice sobbed and trembled as if from sorrow, and the melody became sadder and softer, as if describing the very parting which was so soon to take place ; then the lingering notes died away and the Maestro's hand was still.

' Is that all ? ' murmured the child ; ' oh, play again ! '

Once more he raised his bow on high, and the air resounded with a psalm of triumph—the same melody, but no longer soft or sad, for the gates of that Fair Land were opened wide, and amidst this jubilant strain the child had passed away with the Angel of Death.

'That gladsome song was for thee, my child,' sobbed the Maestro, as he kissed the lips which were yet warm, and fondled the little hands which could never more be stretched out lovingly towards him. 'What is my portion on earth? I am alone, uncared for; all joy has gone from my life. Oh, child, child! would that I might join thee, would that thou couldst come to me! But, alas! all tears are in vain, and yet I weep, and must for ever weep.'

But as he was weeping some gentle strains seemed to reach his ears, and he listened and ceased his mourning.

For the soft strains came from his dearly-loved violin, and distinctly though gently he heard Carissima say: 'Oh, Maestro! I have loved thee all these years, I have been thy friend and faithful companion, and have soothed thy cares for thee. I am still here by thy side, and yet thou sayest thou art alone, when I am nigh to be to thee what I have ever been before, and more now since thou hast but me. And thou canst pass me by when I claim a share in thy grief and claim some kind word from thee! Hast thou none? Did I not love the child as thou hast loved her? Am I not part of thine own soul and life? Have I not a heart like thine? Maestro, through all these years I have responded to thy touch, and have answered thee in love and affection; answer thou now to me.'

He listened as if in a dream.

'Thou art right, dear one, and I am wrong. Little Anita has gone away from us, and I loved her very tenderly. But I am not alone. Heaven has taken all else from me except my genius, which shall be with me for ever. The things of the earth shall pass away, and wealth shall vanish together with fame, honour, and happiness; yet genius, the soul of man, is immortal. Thou art my soul; can self part from self? Fear not, Carissima! thou hast reproached me once, but never shalt thou do so more, for I feel and know that thou wilt be my comfort and my never-failing peace. Come, then, soothe me, for little Anita lieth dead. She loved thee—sing to her once more. She will smile down on us and thank us for our sweet music.'

The night sped on, and the moon shone brightly into the room of death, lighting up the face of the dead and the face of the living, bedewed with tears, while the sweet voice of Carissima was answering as of old to her master's touch and comforting him in his grief.

If, dear friends, you were to ask me how it was possible for the violin to speak, I should remind you that Art and Nature have voices for all those who care to listen.

Does not a beautiful picture actually tell you its own tale, and

does not a fine piece of architecture or sculpture bring to your mind the genius, and patience, and loving labour bestowed on it? If you pick up a shell on the sea-shore, does it not confide to you all about itself and about the sea which has cast it out? And what a history has not the wave-worn pebble to relate! When you hear any lovely music, does it not thrill through you, awaking all your best thoughts and speaking to you like any human voice?

Thus it was that the violin spoke to the musician a language which he could understand, because it was the language of music. And if you love music, as I hope you do, you will find that it will speak to you and soothe you when other powers are as naught. And when other pleasures are passing away, remember that the pleasures and advantages which the cultivation of an Art or of any lofty subject brings, whether it be the Art of Music, or Painting, or Poetry, or the study of Nature, are eternal, ever fresh, ever varied, and ever beautiful.

BEATRICE HARRADEN

From Beyond.

It may be that these hours that I am occupying with writing this are the last that I shall spend on earth, and I use them thus for these reasons, that you all may know that I die with gladness ; that my last hour on earth, could I but recognise it when it comes, would be my happiest, though I should sorrow for the parting that would then, unknown to you and silently, take place between us ; and also that you, Domenic, may know and believe what now I fear you doubt, that there *is* a life beyond the grave which we all must enter into.

You all know the unhappy, solitary childhood that I led ; doubly an orphan, I had grown up unloved and uncared for, with no child-companion, in my uncle's austere charge, until in a happy day you came to live near my sad old home and by your never-ending kindness gave me such happiness as till then I had not known. But the sadness of my younger years had made me unresponsive and undemonstrative, although I keenly felt your affection towards me, and I grew up self-contained and oftener sombre than gay. I knew that you all noticed this, and wondered how it was that I was silent and almost sad when all your bright home-circle was gay and laughing ; you could not then think how it was that I too was not gay as you. By your geniality and mirth you did much to help me, but 'the old-fashioned boy,' as I once heard you call me, had grown too fond of solitude and the life of his own dreams to enter fully into your ways and doings ; and although, dear friend, I know your motherly heart was torn and sad for me, when I went solitary away, yet I fear your family, happy in itself, could not long miss the silent companion that had been so long with them and yet was not of them.

After I left Norton you lost sight of me for some years, but perhaps heard from time to time of my doings and wanderings. I was, as you know, at Oxford for nearly two years, and then, tired of everything in England, weary of the old dull round of learning that landed one nowhere, I threw up my university career and left for the Continent. There was nothing to keep me in England beyond yourselves, and in my years of absence my memory of you had grown dulled and dim, as memory, unrefreshed, so often sadly does. I had formed no strong ties of love or friendship at college or elsewhere ; I had made, of course, some slight acquaintances at the university, men came up at the beginning of term and I was

pleased to see them, and they went down at end of term and in no wise did I miss them. So alone, as I had always been, I left England. I had no special aim or object in my travels, but turned aside here or there, to this city or that secluded valley, just as the whim of the moment led me. The love of Art had grown upon me with my knowledge of it, and although so immaterial a companion could not satisfy the craving of my human soul for love and fellowship, still it helped to stave off melancholy and self-communing, by partly occupying my brain if not my heart.

Four years ago—how short a space as told by days, how long an one as marked by changes and events!—when the skies of northern Europe had turned dull and grey at the dreary advent of winter; when the keen wind rustled in the beds of brown and dried-up reeds through which the streams ran cold and clear; when the leaves lay rotting in aromatic heaps along the wind-swept way-side and under every hedge; when the last swallow had flitted and every summer-loving bird had twittered its farewell and turned sweeping to the south—I turned southwards too and followed them, to live again in a land of warmth and light and colour. These were my only reasons for the journey, but Fate, or Chance, or God—which?—had another object in it. I bless the day I started; I thank God always that he led me where He did.

I travelled slowly to the south of France, staying for a few days in Dijon and others of the quaint, world-forgotten towns that lie along the old *diligence* roads between Paris and Marseilles—those grey old towns with worn and crumbling buildings, where life seems slower and more peaceful than in the busy world—towns where the sleepy citizens live calmly out a life of quiet to a peaceful end. I reached Marseilles one dull sad day in November when even that south city was bleak and cold, and sailed from her great port for Athens, where I intended to pass the winter. The craft I sailed in was a little trading schooner with an Italian master and crew, as bright and cheery as Italian sailors generally are. For eight days, although the weather was unsettled and the glass low, we made fairly good headway, but on the night of the eighth day the glass fell suddenly as the red sun set behind a copper-coloured bank of clouds, the wind, shifting and fitful all day, sank at times till the sails hung flapping against the masts, and then with spiteful suddenness would blow short fierce gusts that snatched the crests from off the surly waves and dashed the spray on deck. As the sun sank the wind rose, not as a hurricane with mad and sudden passion, but steadily increasing every moment with settled rage as though it blew but for the purpose of wrecking the lives of men. The heavy, lurid clouds spread and mounted from the horizon and

the whole sky grew dark and thick. Once or twice through some rift in the heavy cloud-wrack above we saw the stars rush past, and once the waning moon, low down the sky, gleamed for a moment on us with a pale and watery ray.

Two days the storm raged cold and bleak from the north-west ; frequent gusts of icy rain wet us to the skin ; both masts went by the board on the morning of the second day, and it was all that we could do, we were so cramped with exposure and the cold, to cut the tangled rigging and set them adrift behind us. Once free of these we righted, and, the danger of capsizing passed, a small and inefficient jury-mast was rigged up. All that we could do was to keep the schooner well before the wind and drive with it. We had had no 'sight' for three days and could only calculate our position by the roughest of dead reckonings.

All the last day we had been unable to get proper food and no hot drinks, as our stores had been flooded and spoiled, and the galley fire put out, and all of us were exhausted by the endless work and constant excitement. We were only kept afloat by incessant working at the pump, and our hands were raw and blistered with the labour and smarting with the salt. As night fell, the wind, which had lulled a little, rose again, and, as though to mock us with its very fury, it tore apart for a moment the black and heavy clouds that hid the western horizon, and, as they drifted past, the setting sun for an instant shone out crimson as it sank, and edged the clouds with radiant fire. For a moment the very waves seemed turned to blood, so bright was the lurid glare, and then the next the sun sank into the tempestuous sea, and a black and heavy cloud-curtain was drawn again across the west. So night came on, a dark impenetrable night, the momentary gleam of light but illumined the despair depicted on the faces of the crew, for we drifted a mere log before the gale ; every timber straining and the whole ship groaning like some sentient creature crying in distress.

I was holding on to one of the stanchions of the broken taffrail, when the skipper worked his way to where I stood and shouted in my ear that the hard-worked little pump had broken down at last, that the leak was gaining fast upon us, and that unless the sea fell we could not float three hours longer. He spoke calmly, for he was brave and cheery to the last, whilst his men had been shrieking prayers and imprecations by turns to their ineffectual saints. It came sooner than we thought ; we were evidently settling down, the boat had been staved in by the falling of the mast, and only the dingy remained, and that could not have lived for a moment in such a sea. Once a heavy sea broke over us, and the water poured across our little slanting deck, sweeping everything before

it, and, meeting in its rushing the bodies of four sailors lying prone along the deck, clinging with convulsive hands to the stump of the foremast, it tore two of them from their places and swept them powerless to the inky sea. One was a lad from Trieste. I heard his wild shriek as the waters engulfed him. I was too excited to feel much fear; the howling wind, the scudding clouds, and raging sea were so grand and awful that I could not think of danger, and, besides the mere animal clinging to life, I had little for which I cared to live. I think, too, that my mind was mercifully numbed with the weakness of my body. To the very last the master proved himself to be a noble and unselfish gentleman; he showed no fear for himself, but urging me to try and save myself if yet there was a chance, he helped me to lash myself to one of the spars that still lay in the lee scuppers, that we had brought up from below when we rigged the jury-mast. One moment I was shouting, ineffectually, for the shrieking of the wind quite drowned my words, 'Lash on yourself as well,' and the next I found myself battling, struggling wildly in the mad whirl of water.

For a time, I know not how long, I was stunned and senseless, unconscious alike of life and death, of wreck or raging sea; and then, as life came weakly back, I felt a sense of light and warmth and stillness, strangely at variance with the whirl of fierce waters and the utter darkness of the night I last had known. For a short time longer I lay still with such a languorous feeling of rest and peace, that I almost thought, if think I did, that I was dead and gone to heaven. Presently, as life grew stronger and my senses gained coherency, I felt two firm and powerful hands take mine and chafe them back to warmth, and I felt, too, that my cold wet cheek was lying on a warm, strong breast, whose heart was beating loudly by my ear. I was too weak to move, and lay quite still luxuriating in the sense of safety that the strong encircling arms endowed me with, and feeling life flutter back to my inert and nerveless body. As a faint colour returned to my face, which showed that heart and brain were struggling back together, a gentle hand moved the wet salt hair from my eyes, and without moving I looked up to the face so anxiously bending over me. I thought it was an angel.

With a glad cry as he saw I lived, the young man, who, kneeling at my back, supported me, uttered a few sentences in a language I did not understand, and then beckoned and called to an old servant who was hurrying along the beach with a flask in his hand, to hasten him. Wine was given me, generous life-giving wine, and I could sit up and look around me. What I saw was a

little land-locked bay, whose shore was all of yellow sand streaked here and there with sea-wrack, stranded above high water-mark by the last night's storm ; little waves came gently lapping in to-day from the deep sapphire sea, which lay so bright and calm and beautiful that it was hard to believe it the same savage ocean that last night had swallowed down so many precious souls. The sun was hot and strong though yet the day was young, and the sky so bright and cloudless, and of a blue so pure and clear that one scarce could tell, when looking seawards, where the sky was merged in ocean.

But I did not care to look again on shore or sea or sky when once I had seen my hero, my friend, who saved me and brought me back to life. He stood before me naked in the morning sunshine, fair as a young Greek god, golden-brown in colour, muscular, deep-chested, narrow-flanked, fully developed, yet with some of the gracious lines of youth about him that age so surely steals ; he stood a perfect type of young and beautiful manhood, strong of purpose, pure of soul. That picture of him as he rested silently before me, as the wine coursed through my veins, and I gained strength, the level morning sun gilding the light bronze of his skin, the rich blood flushing in his cheek, the light breeze lifting the crisp waves of his hair, his glorious face glowing with health, and his eyes gleaming with tenderness and pity, I never have forgot.

When I could speak I asked him, in Italian, where I was and what had brought me there, and he replied in the same language, though with a strange rich accent—

‘I came down from the vineyard, Signor, for my morning swim, and, seeing something out yonder at the entrance of the bay that looked like the body of a man tied to a piece of timber, I swam out and found that it was you.’

His voice was grave and sweet, and as he spoke it thrilled me with some strange emotion that stirred my soul to its very depths with a wild love and longing I had never known before. My empty heart seemed filled, and the life-long yearning I had known was now at length appeased. Like those deep meanings that lie hid in passages of music that the greatest masters sometimes write, that speak we scarce know what, but whose grand chords wake thoughts all dormant and unexpressed before, were his voice's tones, and they stole into my heart, and there spoke to it, and my eyes grew dim with tears.

As he spoke he pointed to a little heap of fluttering linen that lay some short way up the beach, and smiled, for he had quite forgotten that he was not dressed.

‘ But how did you get me here ? ’

‘ That was not difficult, Signor, for you were still enough and easily brought in. I feared that you were dead, but hoped a spark of life might linger unextinguished ; and it was no more than anyone could do. No thanks, no thanks ! All you have to do is to come home with me and have food and dry clothing ; mine will fit you.’

He hastily dressed himself in his loose clothing and led me, half supporting me, from the beach towards an old and solid building, with a heavy tower formed of huge but crumbling stones, that stood upon a little elevation overlooking alike the sea and a rich and fertile valley whose gentle slopes and sunny fields led the eye softly to the hilly distance that lay blue in the early sunshine. The path to the half-ruined house lay through a tangled little vineyard, and then a stretch of gnarled old olives whose grey foliage was shimmering in the light sea breeze. I see it now all as a dream. A winding flight of rocky steps, whose sides were green with arbutus and wild myrtle, led to a stone-paved terrace which ran before the house ; this was shaded by a solemn row of dark-green cypresses, centuries old, that seemed to, spirelike, pierce the blue. Here was the stately entrance to the house. He led me in. So I found him.

I soon regained my strength enough to talk, and from my companion learned where it was the waves had cast me. The schooner had been driven far out of her course, and it was near to Mentos, the most southern island of the Greek Archipelago, that she had foundered. Here my friend, Lilo Ikonides, was born, and had always lived, with the people of the island, who were almost as much his property as was the land they tilled and tended. Here his father had patriarchally dwelt on his lands, growing his grapes, making his wine, feeding his silkworms, and drying his fruit, and since his death, a year ago, all had proceeded as before, with the difference only that Lilo now was head and chief. Here I stayed, each day happier in the sympathy of a heart whose every chord and fibre thrilled in perfect accord with my own, studying a character that each day more and more I learned to value and respect, till one bright morning, when going to the beach, I saw a small craft riding at anchor in the harbour, which was, I knew, the expected boat that was to call here for its yearly cargo of cases of dried fruits. I returned to the house and told my friend that I could no longer live upon his hospitality, and that now my chance was come for getting back to Greece.

How well I remember the dim, cool chamber, bare but for the worn rich Eastern carpets that lay in places on the stone-flagged

floor, and the few heavy pieces of carved wood furniture that were perhaps coeval with the house itself. The one deep window in the wall was shaded with a wicker trellis through which the sun just pierced its way in narrow lines of light that fell upon the floor, and wavered up and down as the light breeze moved the screen. A little lizard, slim and brown, was on the stonework, and stirred its restless head from side to side, and then ran swiftly up the wall. Lilo had just come in from the vineyard, and still wore his large and shady hat, and in his hand he bore a bunch of ripe late grapes which he gave me as I came in. When I told him that I thought I now must leave him, I saw his colour change, and he said—

‘Leave me! Why? I thought that you seemed happy here. Why should you go? Oh, I cannot let you go again, I have no friend but you; until you came I never had an equal nor a friend but my father, who is dead.’

As he spoke he crossed the room and took my arm. His voice shook as he went on—

‘Are you tired of Mentos? do my olives and my vines, my dull home and simple life weary you? Then I will leave Mentos too, and sail with you where you will, but quit you—never.’

Is it to be wondered that I stayed? I wished for no greater happiness than to live my life out there. I found the one thing wanting, the friend for whom my heart had yearned, the friend whom I could love, whom I *did* love better than life, and without doubt or fear. The last division was broken down between us, the last veil of thin reserve which men wrap round their hearts, and which is latest to be moved, was swept away, and I knew that for us two no further thought of parting would sadden us again.

I sent for books from England, and I bought a little yacht in which, sometimes for happy months together, we cruised about that summer sea, and then, perhaps, month after month we should remain in Mentos, leading a happy peaceful life with our people and our books. But what avails it to tell how the three years passed; our friendship but grew stronger and our love more pure.

Then came the fatal summer when from the East the dread foe, Cholera, stalked through the islands, leaping here and there—this place untouched, that one devastated. Lilo would not leave—could I have asked him?—the people who looked up to him as their natural chief and head; and often have seen I him when we were working midst the dying and the dead, open wide, as is their custom, the casements and the portals of the house where dead some strong man lay, that his freed soul might sweep outwards to the open air of heaven. Often have I heard his fresh voice

joining in the grand pathetic chant of the living o'er their dead—a chant time-hoary but still sung in those Ionian Isles. ‘He is now before his Maker; He now judges. May He pardon all his sins.’

The summer had been dry; for months no rain had fallen, and the whole island lay as though beneath a blight; the vines had withered and the rich foliage of all the plain lay brown and shrivelled in the sun. Almost a third of all our people had sickened and died before the Plague seemed ended. For a week we had had no death and we hoped all other lives were spared. And then there came an awful day, a day of close and thunderous heat, when the still and stifling land lay baking in the merciless glare of the fierce unclouded sun; that day I saw my lad was stricken. I had him carried to the coolest chamber in the thick-walled old building and tended him myself with all the care that love could prompt.

Oh, it was piteous to see his sufferings, gladly would I have taken on myself the utmost pains of hell if only by so doing he could have been relieved. To see him writhing in the paroxysms of his pain, his noble limbs contorted and his features drawn and contracted, was an agony to me that tore my heart. When conscious, he would try to hide all sign of suffering that I might be spared the sight, but the convulsive grasp of his hand on mine, and the sweat that stood in drops upon his brow, told me too plainly all that he so silently endured. Each moment of that day, each trivial sound, seem burned into my memory—how the birds sang to the merciless blue sky, and how the *cicadas* chirred in the dusty, drought-stricken trees. The water that I sprinkled on the stone-flagged floor was sucked up by the parched dry air, and not till evening came the least relief.

When night came on, I could see that he was sinking fast, but the pain had left him and I could almost find it in my heart, after seeing all his suffering, to thank the Lord that his end would probably be peace. He slept towards evening and all that short summer night as I watched beside him—what were my night thoughts?—I could see him drifting from me, life slowly ebbing out, whilst I sat by, strong of body, heart, and purpose, yet unable to stay him for an hour. Oh, it was hard that he should die, that I must lose all that I loved on earth and yet live on myself, perhaps for years, alone.

At last, towards morning, when the rosy flush of daybreak had tinged the east with warmth and colour, and when the spray of vine that had crept in at the window in the white thickness of the wall was swaying with its tendrils in the cool breeze that

sprang up with the dawning, his heavy eyes unclosed and he awoke—it was to consciousness and to consciousness of death. He bore it better far than I. There seems to come a calm to those about to die that until then we know not of, and this calm had come to Lilo.

‘Don’t grieve, dear heart, because I go before—nay, foolish fellow, there’s a tear—have we not often said that those are happiest far who die before old age and sorrows come upon them?’

‘Ah, but, Lilo, you are leaving me alone.’

‘It is hard to die, to leave you and all the beauty of the world, and I am young; but it were harder far did I not feel that it is not to nothingness I go, but a step to something higher.’

‘Oh, my lad,’ cried I, ‘that I could give my life for yours.’

‘Nay,’ said he, with a ghost of his old bright smile, ‘where should I be then, or of what use? I have lived my span, the sun has always shone for me, my agony is over, and heaven I feel is near. It is best that I should go if it must be one of us. I could not bear to live alone, and you are stronger. Come, lift me’ (his dear voice was growing weaker), ‘and let me lie against this faithful heart. Do you remember how I found you and held you thus and brought you back to life? How long is it ago? You are the stronger now.’

He looked up at me as I raised him, and laid his heavy head upon my shoulder; the soft tendrils of his hair caressed my cheek; he seemed easier so, and a faint smile flickered on his lips a moment as he faintly said—

‘I think that I can sleep.’

For one hour longer I saw that he still breathed, and then, opening his eyes and moving his hand in mine, as though in death to clasp it faithfully in his, the last faint sigh quivered from his lips. A slight but awful change fell like a shadow on his face, and I knew that his loving heart was stilled for ever. The golden sun shot bright and strong into the cloudless sky, birds broke forth into their morning song, and the solemn cypresses waved a moving shadow across the room; but for me alone were light and colour, for me alone the shadow or the song, for him, silence, darkness, and the grave.

I could not live there when he was gone: for months I wandered aimless with my grief, seeking a solace that I never found. A little time ago I came back here—home, if this great empty house of mine can so be called. You were good and kind as ever; ah! but I was changed. You noticed it, and now you know the cause; you know my story.

To-night I have been reading in the library till late, and all the

house was silent as I came up the shallow stairs to bed. The heavy door swung to behind me and the catching of the lock sounded through the dim old hall; my candle threw strange shadows that moved as I climbed the stair, and then the house was left to silence and to gloom. The moonlight was streaming in through the open windows of my room, and from the garden below there floated a sweet and heavy scent of roses, warm and rich and musky, which met me as I entered. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night save where yonder in the dingle a nightingale poured forth a rapture of sorrow and of song. I had undressed and put out my light and was kneeling on the low window-seat resting on the broad stone sill of the open casement; my eyes were humid with unshed tears, for the stillness and beauty of the night and the half-heard music of the bird awoke my heart's memories and with my friend again I lived in Mentos. Leaning there I prayed as I had never prayed before, that once more, if only for a moment, I might see my friend to drive my doubts away, to learn by seeing him that there is another life beyond, and that our parting, not eternal, was but for a time.

‘O God!’ I cried, ‘give me a sign.’

And then, no answer coming to my prayer, my head fell on my outstretched arms and grief relieved itself in a passion of hot tears. But even as I wept there came upon me a rapturous sense of happiness of which I cannot speak, a perfect calm of love and longing satisfied and joy not of this earth; and then I felt a well-known hand caress my low-bowed head and lie about my neck. My very heart stood still with ecstasy, for I knew that he had come to comfort me. I did not move nor even look at him, it was happiness enough to lie and know that he was near. His arm seemed warm and human, and I felt it through the thinness of my shirt as he stooped and laid it round my shoulders. He thought, perhaps, that I should fear him coming from beyond the grave, and would not alarm me with speaking till he thus had told me he was near. But perfect love casteth out fear, and never for an instant did I tremble; my heart was too full of happiness for fear to enter in.

Then he spoke—I knew his voice—it fell upon my ear like a heart-remembered melody, and as he spoke I turned and looked up at his face. O God! I thank Thee for this grace!—it was he. I cannot tell the beauty of it, the likeness of him as he was still lingered there, but etherialised and changed, and from his stedfast eyes there shone a holy light of love and pity that flooded me with an infinite content. I know not whether they were words he spoke but his meaning reached my soul as music sometimes does with expression truer far than language ever has.

'Mourn not,' said he, 'for I am ever near you. I await you on the threshold and now have come to tell you that you join me soon. Dear heart, be glad; but a brief space now divides us.'

And with a happy smile, expectant, almost of welcome, he was not there.

I rise and get a light and write you this, my glad heart blissful with the knowledge that we shall meet again. How soon I know not; I am content to wait; but perhaps—the nightingale's song is hushed, the dawn is not far off, the whole earth sleeps a heavy sleep of perfect rest, and heaven seems near—but perhaps this very night I look my last upon

ALFRED ST. JOHNSTON.

Christine.

' NEVER ON EARTH AGAIN.'

It was the twenty-third of December, a still beautiful night, not a breath of air stirring the trees, with the light powdering of snow, that sparkled and shone in the weird moonlight.

So still, so bright, was it, that a spider's web spun in delicate, intricate fashion from one frost-bitten rose-leaf to another, stood out from its dark background as if outlined in diamonds ; and far-off church bells sent their strokes so solemnly and distinctly through the room, that before the eleventh had sounded, even Robert Lovell's absorbed attention was roused, and putting aside his book, he rose, crossed the room, and flinging open the unshuttered window, looked forth into the quiet winter night. Looked slowly from its glistening diamonds, up to where shone its numberless stars.

A year ago, he had stood by the same window, at the same hour, thinking, how, if all had gone well, it would have been the evening of his wedding day ; and almost unconsciously he began comparing his sensations of to-day with those of that bygone time, tearing down the dividing curtain that twelve months had drawn between past and present.

' Though there is not much to remind me of it,' he thought, ' this quiet scene, and that other December night, with the wind roaring through the trees, and the rain falling in torrents, and an echo of its fury in my own breast.'

' I said then I would never forgive her. I wonder, do I forgive her now ? No, I do not think I *forgive*,' folding his arms, but perhaps I understand her better.

' She was so weak and timid, and they persuaded her to say " Yes." Ah, why did she ! If she had only told me the truth ; but,' sighing, ' she had not the courage, and I—I never guessed it. And so—Yes, I suppose the sequel was natural.'

And his mind for a minute lingered over the sequel. The timid, gentle girl, struggling to put aside the love that had been forbidden her, and be kind to the suitor who had found favour in her parents' eyes. Then the old story :—a chance meeting with him who had won her heart before wealthy Robert Lovell came a-wooing ; a few words from him telling of the wherefore of his departure in silence ;—a soft reply from her which told how the

silence had broken her heart ; then one day a letter signed ‘ John Fane ’ addressed to old Mr. Davidson, informing him, that his daughter had preferred poverty shared with the writer, to that other future to which he had essayed to bend her unwilling feet. And by the same post an envelope containing one small sheet of paper was put into Robert Lovell’s hands, a small sheet all blotted with many tears, and on it only two words written : ‘ Forgive me,’ and a signature, which for the moment puzzled him—‘ C. FANE.’ But that had all happened more than a year ago.

It was an old story now, quite thrust out of his life, and the woman who had been his love was the wife of John Fane, living far away in India.

No tidings of her ever reached him ; he did not wish for any.

She had cut herself adrift from him—from the love and the wealth that would have stood between her and the rough places of life—and had chosen instead—he paused in his thoughts, and said half aloud : ‘ Has chosen instead, a bad-tempered man with a narrow income. That is about it.’

He sighed quickly and impatiently when he had so spoken, and shifted his position, leaning more heavily against the window frame.

‘ I wonder if she has ever repented ? ’

The thought flashed quickly through his mind, and perhaps from slight consciousness of motive, that was the mainspring of the thought, he coloured a little in the moonlight.

Then shivered, roused to the fact that the night was cold, if still, and that he had been standing a long time by the open window.

He took a final look abroad, noticing, as he did so, that the conservatory door stood open.

‘ I must go and shut it,’ he decided, and closed the window.

‘ Last year, as I did that,’ he reflected, ‘ my last thought was that I *hoped* she would live to repent ; to-night,’ waveringly, and there paused, and added, as he turned the arm-chair round to the fire, ‘ to-night I am not sure.

‘ And yet she wrecked my life ; took out of it all the happiness that she had herself promised it should contain. Why should I wish her life to be happy either ! ’

Turning from the chill contemplation of the outside world to the warmth of the fireside, did not break the chain of his thoughts, did not cause these to shift from the centre figure, round which the hour and scene had served to group them.

He scarcely noted that the fire needed replenishing, as he traced in its red caverns the story of his life. The little, lurid

tongues of flame, lighting with transient gleam the few bright hours of his engagement, with the shrinking, timid girl whose love he had once felt so sure of winning.

And as he watched, his thoughts grew harder towards her, though he had fancied sometimes in these late months they had been softening, or perhaps they had only usurped a less prominent place in his life, thrust aside by the endless work with which he strove to replace that other, happier life that was to have been his.

'I must not let my mind dwell on it—it changes me, hardens me.'

But for the moment he did not check the current, rather allowed himself to contemplate with a kind of defiant satisfaction the idea that she was learning in her Indian exile that there were worse things in life than remaining true to the man who loved her.

'Come in.'

The knock, gentle, hesitating as it was, made itself distinctly heard through all the turmoil of his brain.

'Come in,' he repeated, as there was a moment's lingering still; then very noiselessly the door was pushed open, and a slender woman's figure entered the room.

Long before she stood beside him, almost before his eyes had done more than take in the slim outlines in the shrouding cloak, Robert Lovell knew who it was.

And seeing her, he felt no surprise, no wonder that she should be there; that no dividing ocean stretched between them; on the contrary, she seemed to him for the moment merely the embodiment of his thoughts—that was all.

Even her unannounced arrival failed to startle him; the open conservatory door seemed to explain it.

But seeing her thus standing before him, silent, for she spoke no word of greeting, it was strange how his thoughts changed. The point of view had shifted at once. This was the girl he remembered, who had striven to please him and her father, and had failed.

Not boldly declining the task she found too hard, but slipping out of it, leaving others to bear the burden she had shrunk from. Yes, the weakness that had faltered before her share in the battle of life was plainly visible in the pleading eyes, the trembling lips. But then, it was for all these things he had loved her—before he knew.

And for the moment it was of his love alone that he thought. 'Christine!' he cried, and for the moment only the past was

present to him, 'what brings you to me to-night?' And then as she lifted her eyes, and looked at him, he realised the change the year had brought to her. So white her cheeks, so large and sad her eyes, he felt that it might have been possible even for him to have met, and not have known her.

'How changed you are,' he said then, and his voice almost involuntarily softened. 'Have twelve months done so much?'

'Life is too hard for me,' she said, and there was a suggestion of tears in her voice, which had the sad emphasis of her eyes. 'I made you suffer, I know it well.—Ah,' coming a step nearer, 'how many gray hairs you have, that you had not when I saw you last! Is that all my doing?'

'Yes,' he answered slowly, 'that is all your doing. And you, lifting his eyes, and looking at her again. 'Are you happy? But, no, I see you are not. Ten minutes ago I hoped you were not.—I hoped your life was as bare and wretched as mine is.—Now that I have seen you—'

'Well?' she questioned, as he hesitated.

'Now I wish that you were happier. But I knew it,' almost exultantly, a moment later repeating his own words of so short a time ago. 'A bad-tempered man with a small income, what chances were there of happiness?'

'But did you wish,' she cried, kneeling down by his side, and laying her slender ungloved hand on his, a hand on which gleamed her wedding ring, 'did you wish it? Are you glad to know that he is tired of me, unkind to me, that I find life too hard to bear? Is this all your love was worth? Could such a flower indeed yield such a poison?'

His own words! Just that which he had thought himself, but letting the idea half vaguely, half fearfully surge through his mind, was different from hearing it put in plain words, with those sad, heartbroken eyes looking into his.

'No,' he said, sitting more upright, and taking the small trembling hands in his. 'No, you are right, that would be a poor sort of love; mine was of better worth than that.'

'Do not cry, poor child, poor child,' smoothing back the fair hair from her forehead.

'I feel your tears still falling upon my hand. Tell me, what can I do for you. Why have you come to me?'

She half lifted her head, but did not take her hands from his.

'Now you look kind and good, as you did in the old days when you were always so tender to me, that I almost grew to love you.'

'Almost!' he repeated. 'Ah, child, if you had stayed, I would have made you love me!'

'No, I could not—I loved him always, always. But I knew you were good, very good—only'—she sighed. 'But you are changed.'

'I also?'

'Yes, you are not like the Robert Lovell I once knew. Your eyes have grown stern and hard—they frighten me; frighten me so, that when I came in, and saw you, I could not tell you what I had come for.'

'What was it?' he said gently. 'Trust me, tell me.'

'Only for your forgiveness,' she sobbed, clasping her hands tighter, 'only that; but I am afraid to ask you. I thought always that if you knew I craved for it, you were so good, you would grant it, but when I looked in your face, I read there, that you would not. I read in your eyes that you were glad that I had suffered too, that you had been hoping all this year that he was making my life miserable, that you would rejoice when you knew it was so.'

'You were quite right,' he answered slowly. 'I have never forgiven you, never. But—'

She had slipped her hand away, and had risen to her feet, wrapping the heavy folds of her cloak about her.

'Then that is all,' she said, her voice falling sadly in the empty room. 'It would have made me happier, I think,' hesitating, and looking towards him once again—'and—'

'Come here,' he said gently, stretching out his hand and taking hers. 'Come here, and look again into my eyes. Do you not see written there, as plainly as you hear my words, Christine, that all I have to forgive, is forgiven, and I wish that with my life, I could buy back your happiness.'

'Yes,' she answered softly; 'I see it all there.'

And having so spoken, she sank down on the ground at his feet.

He felt the tears rising to his eyes as he noted her, and then: 'I trust you may be happy yet,' he said.

'Forgiven,' he heard her say very softly; 'yes, I am happier.'

There were a few seconds' silence, whilst he watched the slender outlines of her figure in the firelight; seconds in which he was wondering what he should say next. Then the door of his study was suddenly flung open, and looking up, he saw standing on the threshold a lovely dark-eyed woman, a glad vision of white satin and diamonds.

'Cecile,' he exclaimed, rising hastily to his feet, and moving towards her, with the vague idea of standing between her and the timid, shrinking figure in the fireglow.

But something in his sister's face changed the current of his thoughts. Something was wrong, but the something must surely have to do with the other, and he glanced unconsciously back ; but no shrouded figure met his hasty glance.

'Where is she ?' he cried.

'Robert !' his sister's hand was on his arm, her lovely eyes, misty with unshed tears, were looking into his. 'Robert, I have come straight to you ; I was at the Davenants' where I heard the saddest thing. And I was so afraid,' her voice trembling, and a tear falling, 'that you might hear it first from someone else.'

'What is it ?' he questioned.

An awed feeling stole over him, due in part to the shadow of the past, in part to the shadow of the future.

'She is dead——'

'Who ?' he faltered, but there was no need to ask.

He knew, though no name answered his question.

'Yes, she is dead, her baby was born—and they both died. Oh, Robert, is it not too sad ?'

He was sitting down now, not in the chair drawn close up to the dying embers of the fire, but in the big arm-chair from which he had risen to look at the beauties of the outside world.

And Cecile had her arms about his neck ; he could feel her tears falling fast.

'You must never again feel hard about her,' she said. 'Of course, you had a great deal to bear, but I knew her well, and was so fond of her—and she was never brave.'

'No,' he said gently, 'no.' And then, 'Poor child. No, Cecile, I do not feel hard at all. If,' hesitatingly, 'I ever have been so, such is no longer the case. I have quite forgiven her.'

'Ah, yes, now,' began his sister.

'No, not now, Cecile, I forgave her before I knew of this. Goodnight,' he said a moment later ; 'it was kind of you to come, but I should like best to be alone.'

His sister stooped and kissed him, and noted, as she did so, that the dark hair was growing sadly gray, but that on the kindly face was an expression of tender pathos, that had been absent from it, she had often noted, with a sigh, of late. She said nothing, only turned away in silence, and had reached the door, before his voice calling 'Cecile,' arrested her attention. She turned round to find that he had followed her.

'Tell me,' he said, in a slow, constrained voice. 'You have often heard of her since she married. Was she'—his eyes shifting from hers—'happy ?'

'Yes, quite happy—I am sure. She wrote to me once'—speak-

ing timidly—‘and told me so. You are glad, are you not, to know it?’

‘Surely,’ he replied. ‘Oh, Cecile, it cannot be that *you*’—he paused abruptly—‘Goodnight,’ he said again, and opening the door, watched her until she had disappeared, then re-closed it.

He walked slowly back to the chair on the hearth-rug, and stood there a moment, in silence watching the place where the kneeling figure had been; whence she had turned her pathetic eyes towards him. ‘It was all a dream,’ then he said, ‘but so real, that I still can see her eyes, and hear her soft voice.’

He moved over to the unshuttered window, and flung it open, as he had done earlier in the same evening, and looked abroad at the peaceful night; where moonbeams still were turning the light snow to diamonds, myriads of stars still shining overhead. Through the still cold night came the loud strokes of a church bell, cleaving their way distinctly through the frosty air—twelve, he counted—and then; ‘It is Christmas Eve,’ he said. ‘Only one hour since I stood here before, and said, I could not forgive her—and now I have learnt that she is dead.’

THE AUTHOR OF ‘MISS MOLLY.’

The Mysterious Occurrence in Piccadilly.

I.

I REALLY never felt so profoundly ashamed of myself in my whole life as when my father-in-law, Professor W. Bryce Murray, of Oriel College, Oxford, sent me the last number of the Proceedings of the Society for the Investigation of Supernatural Phenomena. As I opened the pamphlet, a horrid foreboding seized me that I should find in it, detailed at full length, with my name and address in plain printing (not even asterisks), that extraordinary story of his about the mysterious occurrence in Piccadilly. I turned anxiously to page 14, which I saw was neatly folded over at the corner ; and there, sure enough, I came upon the Professor's remarkable narrative, which I shall simply extract here, by way of introduction, in his own admirable and perspicuous language.

'I wish to communicate to the Society,' says my respected relation, 'a curious case of wraiths or doubles, which came under my own personal observation, and for which I can vouch on my own authority, and that of my son-in-law, Dr. Owen Mansfield, keeper of Accadian Antiquities at the British Museum. It is seldom, indeed, that so strange an example of a supernatural phenomenon can be independently attested by two trustworthy scientific observers, both still living.'

'On the 12th of May, 1873—I made a note of the circumstance at the time, and am therefore able to feel perfect confidence as to the strict accuracy of my facts—I was walking down Piccadilly about four o'clock in the afternoon, when I saw a simulacrum or image approaching me from the opposite direction, exactly resembling in outer appearance an undergraduate of Oriel College, of the name of Owen Mansfield. It must be carefully borne in mind that at this time I was not related or connected with Mr. Mansfield in any way, his marriage with my daughter having taken place some eleven months later : I only knew him then as a promising junior member of my own College. I was just about to approach and address Mr. Mansfield, when a most singular and mysterious event took place. The simulacrum appeared spontaneously to glide up towards me with a peculiarly rapid and noiseless motion, waved a wand or staff which it bore in its hands thrice round my head, and then vanished hastily in the direction of an hotel which stands at the corner of Albemarle Street. I followed it quickly to the door, but on inquiry of the porter, I learned that

he himself had observed nobody enter. The simulacrum seems to have dissipated itself or become invisible suddenly in the very act of passing through the folding glass portals which give access to the hotel from Piccadilly.

'That same evening, by the last post, I received a hastily-written note from Mr. Mansfield, bearing the Oxford postmark, dated Oriel College, 5 P.M., and relating the facts of an exactly similar apparition which had manifested itself to him, with absolute simultaneity of occurrence. On the very day and hour when I had seen Mr. Mansfield's wraith in Piccadilly, Mr. Mansfield himself was walking down the Corn Market in Oxford, in the direction of the Taylor Institute. As he approached the corner, he saw what he took to be a vision or image of myself, his tutor, moving towards him in my usual leisurely manner. Suddenly, as he was on the point of addressing me with regard to my Aristotle lecture the next morning, the image glided up to him in a rapid and evasive manner, shook a green silk umbrella with a rhinoceros-horn handle three times around his head, and then disappeared incomprehensibly through the door of the Randolph Hotel. Returning to college in a state of breathless alarm and surprise, at what he took to be an act of incipient insanity or extreme inebriation on my part, Mr. Mansfield learnt from the porter, to his intense astonishment, that I was at that moment actually in London. Unable to conceal his amazement at this strange event, he wrote me a full account of the facts while they were still fresh in his memory: and as I preserve his note to this day, I append a copy of it to my present communication, for publication in the Society's Transactions.'

'There is one small point in the above narrative to which I would wish to call special attention, and that is the accurate description given by Mr. Mansfield of the umbrella carried by the apparition he observed in Oxford. This umbrella exactly coincided in every particular with the one I was then actually carrying in Piccadilly. But what is truly remarkable, and what stamps the occurrence as a genuine case of supernatural intervention, is the fact that *Mr. Mansfield could not possibly ever have seen that umbrella in my hands, because I had only just that afternoon purchased it at a shop in Bond Street.* This, to my mind, conclusively proves that no mere effort of fancy or visual delusion based upon previous memories, vague or conscious, could have had anything whatsoever to do with Mr. Mansfield's observation at least. It was, in short, distinctly an objective apparition, as distinguished from a mere subjective reminiscence or hallucination.'

As I laid down the Proceedings on the breakfast table with a sigh, I said to my wife (who had been looking over my shoulder

while I read): ‘Now, Nora, we’re really in for it. What on earth do you suppose I’d better do?’

Nora looked at me with her laughing eyes laughing harder and brighter than ever. ‘My dear Owen,’ she said, putting the Proceedings promptly into the waste paper basket, ‘there’s really nothing on earth possible now, except to make a clean breast of it.’

I groaned. ‘I suppose you’re right,’ I answered, ‘but it’s a precious awkward thing to have to do. However, here goes.’ So I sat down at once with pen, ink, and paper at my desk, to draw up this present narrative as to the real facts about the ‘Mysterious Occurrence in Piccadilly.’

II.

IN 1873 I was a fourth-year man, going in for my Greats at the June examination. But as if Aristotle and Mill and the affair of Coreyra were not enough to occupy one young fellow’s head at the age of twenty-three, I had foolishly gone and fallen in love, undergraduate fashion, with the only really pretty girl (I insist upon putting it, though Nora has struck it out with her pen) in all Oxford. She was the daughter of my tutor, Professor Bryce Murray, and her name (as the astute reader will already have inferred) was Nora.

The Professor had lost his wife some years before, and he was left to bring up Nora by his own devices, with the aid of his sister, Miss Lydia Amelia Murray, the well-known advocate of female education, woman’s rights, anti-vaccination, vegetarianism, the Tichborne claimant, and psychic force. Nora, however, had no fancy for any of these multifarious interests of her aunt’s: I have reason to believe she takes rather after her mother’s family: and Miss Lydia Amelia Murray early decided that she was a girl of no intellectual tastes of any sort, who had better be kept at school at South Kensington as much as possible. Especially did Aunt Lydia hold it to be undesirable that Nora should ever come in contact with that very objectionable and wholly antagonistic animal, the Oriel undergraduate. Undergraduates were well known to laugh openly at woman’s rights, to devour underdone beefsteaks with savage persistence, and to utter most irreverent and ribald jests about psychic force.

Still, it is quite impossible to keep the orbit of a Professor’s daughter from occasionally crossing that of a stray meteoric undergraduate. Nora only came home to Oxford in vacation time: but during the preceding Long I had stopped up for the sake of pursuing my Accadian studies in a quiet spot, and it was then that I first quite accidentally met Nora. I was canoeing on the Cherwell

one afternoon, when I came across the Professor and his daughter in a punt, and saw the prettiest girl in all Oxford actually holding the pole in her own pretty little hands, while that lazy old man lolled back at his ease with a book, on the luxurious cushions in the stern. As I passed the punt, I capped the Professor, of course, and looking back a minute later I observed that the pretty daughter had got her pole stuck fast in the mud, and couldn't, with all her force, pull it out again. In another minute, she had lost her hold of it, and the punt began to drift of itself down the river towards Iffley.

Common politeness naturally made me put back my canoe, extricate the pole, and hand it as gracefully as I could to the Professor's daughter. As I did so, I attempted to raise my straw hat cautiously with one hand, while I gave back the pole with the other: an attempt which of course compelled me to lay down my paddle on the front of the canoe, as I happen to be only provided with two hands, instead of four like our earlier ancestors. I don't know whether it was my instantaneous admiration for Nora's pretty blush, which distracted my attention from the purely practical question of equilibrium, or whether it was her own awkwardness and modesty in taking the pole, or finally whether it was my tutor's freezing look that utterly disconcerted me, but at any rate, just at that moment, something unluckily (or rather luckily) caused me to lose my balance altogether. Now, everybody knows that a canoe is very easily upset: and in a moment, before I knew exactly where I was, I found the canoe floating bottom upward about three yards away from me, and myself standing, safe and dry, in my tutor's punt, beside his pretty blushing daughter. I had felt the canoe turning over as I handed back the pole, and had instinctively jumped into the safer refuge of the punt, which saved me at least the ignominy of appearing before Miss Nora Murray in the ungraceful attitude of clambering back, wet and dripping, into an upset canoe.

The inexorable logic of facts had thus convinced the Professor of the impossibility of keeping all undergraduates permanently at a safe distance: and there was nothing open for him now except resignedly to acquiesce in the situation so created for him. However much he might object to my presence, he could hardly, as a Christian and a gentleman, request me to jump in and swim after my canoe, or even, when we had at last successfully brought it alongside with the aid of the pole, to seat myself once more on the soaking cushions. After all, my mishap had come about in the endeavour to render him a service: so he was fain with what grace he could to let me relieve his daughter of the pole, and punt

him back as far as the barges, with my own moist and uncomfortable bark trailing casually from the stern.

As for Nora, being thus thrown unexpectedly into the dangerous society of that gruesome animal, the Oriel undergraduate, I think I may venture to say (from my subsequent experience) that she was not wholly disposed to regard the creature as either so objectionable or so ferocious as she had been previously led to imagine. We got on together so well that I could see the Professor growing visibly wrathful about the corners of the mouth : and by the time we reached the barges, he could barely be civil enough to say Good morning to me when we parted.

An introduction, however, no matter how obtained, is really in these matters absolutely everything. As long as you don't know a pretty girl, you don't know her, and you can't take a step in advance without an introduction. But when once you do know her, heaven and earth and aunts and fathers may try their hardest to prevent you, and yet whatever they try they can't keep you out. I was so far struck with Nora, that I boldly ventured whenever I met her out walking with her father or her aunt, to join myself to the party : and though they never hesitated to show me that my presence was not rapturously welcomed, they couldn't well say to me point-blank, 'Have the goodness, Mr. Mansfield, to go away and not to speak to me again in future.' So the end of it was, that before the beginning of October term, Nora and I understood one another perfectly, and had even managed, in a few minutes' *tête-à-tête* in the parks, to whisper to one another the ingenuous vows of sweet seventeen and two-and-twenty.

When the Professor discovered that I had actually written a letter to his daughter, marked 'Private and Confidential,' his wrath knew no bounds. He sent for me to his rooms, and spoke to me severely. 'I've half a mind, Mansfield,' he said, 'to bring the matter before a college meeting. At any rate, this conduct must not be repeated. If it is, Sir'—he didn't finish the sentence, preferring to terrify me by the effective figure of speech which commentators describe as an *aposiopesis*: and I left him with a vague sense that if it was repeated I should probably incur the penalties of *præmunire* (whatever they may be), or be hanged, drawn, and quartered, with my head finally stuck as an adornment on the acute wings of the Griffin, *vice* Temple Bar removed.

Next day, Nora met me casually at a confectioner's in the High where I will frankly confess that I was engaged in experimenting upon the relative merits of raspberry cream and lemon water ices. She gave me her hand timidly, and whispered to me half under her breath, 'Papa's so dreadfully angry, Owen, and I'm

afraid I shall never be able to meet you any more, for he's going to send me back this very afternoon to South Kensington, and keep me away from Oxford altogether in future.' I saw her eyes were red with crying, and that she really thought our little romance was entirely at an end.

'My darling Nora,' I replied in an undertone, 'even South Kensington is not so unutterably remote that I shall never be able to see you there. Write to me whenever you are able, and let me know where I can write to you. My dear little Nora, if there were a hundred papas and a thousand Aunt Lydias interposed in a square between us, don't you know we should manage all the same to love one another and to overcome all difficulties?'

Nora smiled and half cried at once, and then discreetly turned to order half a pound of glacé cherries. And that was the last that I saw of her for the time at Oxford.

During the next term or two, I'm afraid I must admit that the relations between my tutor and myself were distinctly strained, so much so as continually to threaten the breaking out of open hostilities. It wasn't merely that Nora was in question, but the Professor also suspected me of jeering in private at his psychical investigations. And if the truth must be told, I will admit that his suspicions were not wholly without justification. It began to be whispered among the undergraduates just then that the Professor and his sister had taken to turning *planchettes*, interrogating easy chairs, and obtaining interesting details about the present abode of Shakespeare or Milton from intelligent and well-informed five o'clock tea-tables. It had long been well known that the Professor took a deep interest in haunted houses, considered that the portents recorded by Livy must have something in them, and declared himself unable to be sceptical as to facts which had convinced such great men as Plato, Seneca, and Samuel Johnson. But the table-turning was a new fad, and we noisy undergraduates occasionally amused ourselves by getting up an amateur *séance*, in imitation of the Professor, and eliciting psychical truths, often couched in a surprisingly slangy or even indecorous dialect, from a very lively though painfully irreverent spirit, who discoursed to us through the material intervention of a rickety what-not. However, as the only mediums we employed were the very unprofessional ones of two plain decanters, respectively containing port and sherry, the Professor (who was a teetotaler, and who paid five guineas a *séance* for the services of that distinguished psychical specialist, Dr. Grade) considered the interesting results we obtained as wholly beneath the dignity of scientific inquiry. He even most unworthily endeavoured to stifle research by gating us

all one evening when a materialized spirit, assuming the outer form of the junior exhibitioner, sang a comic song of the period in a loud voice with the windows open, and accompanied itself noisily with a psychical tattoo on the rickety what-not. The Professor went so far as to observe sarcastically that our results appeared to him to be rather spirituous than spiritual.

On May 11, 1873 (I will endeavour to rival the Professor in accuracy and precision) I got a short note from dear Nora, dated from South Kensington, which I, too (though not from psychical motives), have carefully preserved. I will not publish it, however, either here or in the Society's Proceedings, for reasons which will probably be obvious to any of my readers who happen ever to have been placed in similar circumstances themselves. Disengaging the kernel of fact from the irrelevant matter in which it was imbedded, I may state that Nora wrote me somewhat to this effect. She was going next day to the Academy with the parents of some schoolfellow; could I manage to run up to town for the day, go to the Academy myself, and meet her 'quite accidentally, you know, dear,' in the Water-colour Room about half-past eleven?

This was rather awkward; for next day, as it happened, was precisely the Professor's morning for the Herodotus lecture; but circumstances like mine at that moment know no law. So I succeeded in excusing myself from attendance somehow or other. (I hope truthfully) and took the 9 A.M. express up to town. Shortly after eleven I was at the Academy, and waiting anxiously for Nora's arrival. That dear little hypocrite, the moment she saw me approach, assumed such an inimitable air of infantile surprise and innocent pleasure at my unexpected appearance that I positively blushed for her wicked powers of deception.

'*You here, Mr. Mansfield!*' she cried in a tone of the most apparently unaffected astonishment, 'why, I thought it was full term time; surely you ought to be up at Oriel.'

'So I am,' I answered, 'officially; but in my private capacity I've come up for the day to look at the pictures.'

'Oh, how nice!' said that shocking little Nora, with a smile that was childlike and bland. 'Mr. Mansfield is such a great critic, Mrs. Worplesdon, he knows all about art, and artists, and so on. He'll be able to tell us which pictures we ought to admire, you know, and which aren't worth looking at. Mr. Worplesdon, let me introduce you; Mrs. Worplesdon—Miss Worplesdon. How very lucky we should have happened to come across you, Mr. Mansfield!'

The Worplesdons fell immediately, like lambs, into the trap so ingenuously spread for them. Indeed, I have always noticed that

ninety-nine per cent. of the British public, when turned into an art-gallery, are only too glad to accept the opinion of anybody whatsoever, who is bold enough to have one, and to express it openly. Having thus been thrust by Nora into the arduous position of critic by appointment to the Worplesdon party, I delivered myself *ex cathedrâ* forthwith upon the merits and demerits of the entire exhibition; and I was so successful in my critical views that I not only produced an immense impression upon Mr. Worplesdon himself, but also observed many ladies in the neighbourhood nudge one another as they gazed intently backward and forward between wall and catalogue, and heard them whisper audibly among themselves, ‘A gentleman here says the flesh tones on that shoulder are simply marvellous;’ or, ‘That artist in the tweed suit behind us thinks the careless painting of the ferns in the foreground quite unworthy of such a colourist as Daubiton.’ So highly was my criticism appreciated, in fact, that Mr. Worplesdon even invited me to lunch with Nora and his party at a neighbouring restaurant, where I spent the most delightful hour I had passed for the last half-year, in the company of that naughty mendacious little schemer.

About four o’clock, however, the Worplesdons departed, taking Nora with them to South Kensington; and I prepared to walk back in the direction of Paddington, meaning to catch an evening train, and return to Oxford. I was strolling in a leisurely fashion along Piccadilly towards the Park, and looking into all the photographers’ windows, when suddenly an awful apparition loomed upon me—the Professor himself, coming round the corner from Bond Street, folding up a new rhinoceros-handled umbrella as he walked along. In a moment I felt that all was lost. I was up in town without leave; the Professor would certainly see me and recognise me; he would ask me how and why I had left the University, contrary to rules: and I must then either tell him the whole truth, which would get Nora into a fearful scrape, or else run the risk of being sent down in disgrace, which might prevent me from taking a degree, and would at least cause my father and mother an immense deal of unmerited trouble.

Like a flash of lightning, a wild idea shot instantaneously across my brain. Might I pretend to be my own double? The Professor was profoundly superstitious on the subject of wraiths, apparitions, ghosts, brain-waves, and supernatural appearances generally; if I could only manage to impose upon him for a moment by doing something outrageously uncommon or eccentric, I might succeed in stifling further inquiry by setting him from the beginning on a false track which he was naturally prone to

follow. Before I had time to reflect upon the consequences of my act, the wild idea had taken possession of me, body and soul, and had worked itself out in action with all the rapidity of a mad impulse. I rushed frantically up to the Professor, with my eyes fixed in a vacant stare on a point in space somewhere above the tops of the chimney-pots: I waved my stick three times mysteriously around his head; and then, without giving him time to recover from his surprise or to address a single word to me, I bolted off in a Red Indian dance to the nearest corner.

There was an hotel there, which I had often noticed before, though I had never entered it; and I rushed wildly in, meaning to get out as best I could when the Professor (who is very short-sighted) had passed on along Piccadilly in search of me. But fortune, as usual, favoured the bold. Luckily, it was a corner house, and to my surprise, I found when I got inside it, that the hall opened both ways, with a door on to the side street. The porter was looking away as I entered; so I merely ran in of one door and out of the other, never stopping till I met a hansom, into which I jumped and ordered the man to drive to Paddington. I just caught the 4.35 to Oxford, and by a little over six o'clock I was in my own rooms at Oriel.

It was very wrong of me, indeed; I acknowledge it now; but the whole thing had flashed across my undergraduate mind so rapidly that I carried it out in a moment, before I could at all realise what a very foolish act I was really committing. To take a rise out of the Professor, and to save Nora an angry interview, were the only ideas that occurred to me at the second: when I began to reflect upon it afterwards, I was conscious that I had really practised a very gross and wicked deception. However, there was no help for it now; and as I rolled along in the train to Oxford, I felt that to save myself and Nora from utter disgrace, I must carry the plot out to the end without flinching. It then occurred to me that a double apparition would be more in accordance with all recognised principles of psychical manifestation than a single one. At Reading, therefore, I regret to say, I bought a pencil, and a sheet of paper, and an envelope; and before I reached Oxford station, I had written to the Professor what I now blush to acknowledge as a tissue of shocking fables, in which I paralleled every particular of my own behaviour to him by a similar imaginary piece of behaviour on his part to me, only changing the scene to Oxford. It was awfully wrong, I admit. At the time, however, being yet but little more than a schoolboy, after all, I regarded it simply in the light of a capital practical joke. I informed the Professor gravely how I had seen him at four o'clock in the Corn-

Market, and how astonished I was when I found him waving his green silk umbrella three times wildly around my head.

The moment I arrived at Oxford, I dashed up to college in a Hansom, and got the Professor's address in London from the porter. He had gone up to town for the night, it seemed, probably to visit Nora, and would not be back in college till the next morning. Then I rushed down to the post-office, where I was just in time (with an extra stamp) to catch the last post for that night's delivery. The moment the letter was in the box, I repented, and began to fear I had gone too far: and when I got back to my own rooms at last, and went down late for dinner in hall, I confess I trembled not a little, as to the possible effect of my quite too bold and palpable imposition.

Next morning by the second post I got a long letter from the Professor, which completely relieved me from all immediate anxiety as to his interpretation of my conduct. He rose to the fly with a charming simplicity which showed how delighted he was at this personal confirmation of all his own most cherished superstitions. 'My dear Mansfield,' his letter began, 'now hear what, at the very self-same hour and minute, happened to me in Piccadilly.' In fact, he had swallowed the whole thing entire, without a single moment's scepticism or hesitation.

From what I heard afterwards, it was indeed a lucky thing for me that I had played him this shocking trick, for Nora believes he was then actually on his way to South Kensington on purpose to forbid her most stringently from holding any further communication with me in any way. But as soon as this mysterious event took place, he began to change his mind about me altogether. So remarkable an apparition could not have happened except for some good and weighty reason, he argued: and he suspected that the reason might have something to do with my intentions towards Nora. Why, when he was on his way to warn her against me, should a vision, bearing my outer and bodily shape, come straight across his path, and by vehement signs of displeasure endeavour to turn him from his purpose, unless it were clearly well for Nora that my attentions should not be discouraged?

From that day forth, the Professor began to ask me to his rooms and address me far more cordially than he used to do before: he even, on the strength of my singular adventure, invited me to assist at one or two of his psychical séances. Here, I must confess, I was not entirely successful: the distinguished medium complained that I exerted a repellent effect upon the spirits, who seemed to be hurt by my want of generous confidence in their good intentions, and by my suspicious habit of keeping

my eyes too sharply fixed upon the legs of the tables. He declared that when I was present, an adverse influence seemed to pervade the room, due, apparently, to my painful lack of spiritual sympathies. But the Professor condoned my failure in the regular psychical line, in consideration of my brilliant success as a beholder of wraiths and visions. After I took my degree that summer, he used all his influence to procure me the post of keeper of the Accadian Antiquities at the Museum, for which my previous studies had excellently fitted me: and by his friendly aid I was enabled to obtain the post, though I regret to say that, in spite of his credulity in supernatural matters, he still refuses to believe in the correctness of my conjectural interpretation of the celebrated Amalekite cylinders imported by Mr. Ananias, which I have deciphered in so very simple and satisfactory a manner. As everybody knows, my translation may be regarded as perfectly certain, if only one makes the very modest assumption that the cylinders were originally engraved upside down by an Aztec captive, who had learned broken Accadian, with a bad accent, from a Chinese exile, and who occasionally employed Egyptian hieroglyphics in incorrect senses, to piece out his own very imperfect idiom and doubtful spelling of the early Babylonian language. The solitary real doubt in the matter is whether certain extraordinary marks in the upper left hand corner of the cylinder are to be interpreted as accidental scratches, or as a picture representing the triumph of a king over seven bound prisoners, or, finally, as an Accadian sentence in cuneiforms which may be translated either as 'To the memory of Om the Great,' or else as 'Pithor the High Priest dedicates a fat goose to the family dinner on the 25th of the month of midwinter.' Every candid and unprejudiced mind must admit that these small discrepancies or alternatives in the opinions of experts can cast no doubt at all upon the general soundness of the method employed. But persons like the Professor, while ready to accept any evidence at all where their own prepossessions are concerned, can never be induced to believe such plain and unvarnished statements of simple scientific knowledge.

However, the end of it all was that before I had been a month at the Museum, I had obtained the Professor's consent to my marriage with Nora: and as I had had Nora's own consent long before, we were duly joined together in holy matrimony early in October at Oxford, and came at once to live in Hampstead. So, as it turned out, I finally owed the sweetest and best little wife in all Christendom to the mysterious occurrence in Piccadilly.

The Child of the Phalanstery.

'Poor little thing,' said my strong-minded friend compassionately. 'Just look at her! Clubfooted. What a misery to herself and others! In a well-organised state of society, you know, such poor wee cripples as that would be quietly put out of their misery while they were still babies.'

'Let me think,' said I, 'how that would work out in actual practice. I'm not so sure, after all, that we should be altogether the better or the happier for it.'

I.

They sat together in a corner of the beautiful phalanstery garden, Olive and Clarence, on the marble seat that overhung the mossy dell where the streamlet danced and bickered among its pebbly stickles; they sat there, hand in hand, in lovers' guise, and felt their two bosoms beating and thrilling in some strange, sweet fashion, just like two foolish unregenerate young people of the old antisocial prephalansteric days. Perhaps it was the leaven of their unenlightened ancestors still leavening by heredity the whole lump; perhaps it was the inspiration of the calm soft August evening and the delicate afterglow of the setting sun; perhaps it was the deep heart of man and woman vibrating still as of yore in human sympathy, and stirred to its innermost recesses by the unutterable breath of human emotion. But, at any rate, there they sat, the beautiful strong man in his shapely chiton, and the dainty fair girl in her long white robe with the dark green embroidered border, looking far into the fathomless depths of one another's eyes, in silence sweeter and more eloquent than many words. It was Olive's tenth-day holiday from her share in the maidens' household duty of the community; and Clarence, by arrangement with his friend Germain, had made exchange from his own decade (which fell on Plato) to this quiet Milton evening, that he might wander through the park and gardens with his chosen love, and speak his full mind to her now without reserve.

'If only the phalanstery will give its consent, Clarence,' Olive said at last with a little sigh, releasing her hand from his, and gathering up the folds of her stole from the marble flooring of the seat; 'if only the phalanstery will give its consent! but I have my doubts about it. Is it quite right? Have we chosen quite

wisely? Will the hierarch and the elder brothers think I am strong enough and fit enough for the duties of the task? It is no light matter, we know, to enter into bonds with one another for the responsibilities of fatherhood and motherhood. I sometimes feel—forgive me, Clarence—but I sometimes feel as if I were allowing my own heart and my own wishes to guide me too exclusively in this solemn question: thinking too much about you and me, about ourselves (which is only an enlarged form of selfishness, after all), and too little about the future good of the community and—and—' blushing a little, for women will be women even in a phalanstery—'and of the precious lives we may be the means of adding to it. You remember, Clarence, what the hierarch said, that we ought to think least and last of our own feelings, first and foremost of the progressive evolution of universal humanity.'

'I remember, darling,' Clarence answered, leaning over towards her tenderly; 'I remember well, and in my own way, so far as a man can (for we men haven't the moral earnestness of you women, I'm afraid, Olive), I try to act up to it. But, dearest, I think your fears are greater than they need be: you must recollect that humanity requires for its higher development tenderness, and truth, and love, and all the softer qualities, as well as strength and manliness; and if you are a trifle less strong than most of our sisters here, you seem to me at least (and I really believe to the hierarch and to the elder brothers too) to make up for it, and more than make up for it, in your sweet and lovable inner nature. The men of the future mustn't all be cast in one unvarying stereotyped mould; we must have a little of all good types combined, in order to make a perfect phalanstery.'

Olive sighed again. 'I don't know,' she said pensively. 'I don't feel sure. I hope I am doing right. In my aspirations every evening I have desired light on this matter, and have earnestly hoped that I was not being misled by my own feelings: for, oh, Clarence, I do love you so dearly, so truly, so absorbingly, that I half fear my love may be taking me unwittingly astray. I try to curb it; I try to think of it all as the hierarch tells us we ought to; but in my own heart I sometimes almost fear that I may be lapsing into the idolatrous love of the old days, when people married and were given in marriage, and thought only of the gratification of their own personal emotions and affections, and nothing of the ultimate good of humanity. Oh, Clarence, don't hate me and despise me for it; don't turn upon me and scold me: but I love you, I love you, I love you; oh, I'm afraid I love you almost idolatrously!'

Clarence lifted her small white hand slowly to his lips, with that natural air of chivalrous respect which came so easily to the young men of the phalanstery, and kissed it twice over fervidly with quiet reverence. ‘Let us go into the music-room, Olive dearest,’ he said as he rose; ‘you are too sad to-night. You shall play me that sweet piece of Marian’s that you love so much; and that will quiet you, darling, from thinking too earnestly about this serious matter.’

II.

Next day, when Clarence had finished his daily spell of work in the fruit-garden (he was third under-gardener to the community), he went up to his own study, and wrote out a little notice in due form to be posted at dinner-time on the refectory door: ‘Clarence and Olive ask leave of the phalanstery to enter with one another into free contract of holy matrimony.’ His pen trembled a little in his hand as he framed that familiar set form of words (strange that he had read it so often with so little emotion, and wrote it now with so much: we men are so selfish!); but he fixed it boldly with four small brass nails on the regulation notice-board, and waited, not without a certain quiet confidence, for the final result of the communal council.

‘Aha,’ said the hierarch to himself with a kindly smile, as he passed into the refectory at dinner-time that day, ‘has it come to that, then? Well, well, I thought as much; I felt sure it would. A good girl, Olive: a true, earnest, lovable girl: and she has chosen wisely, too; for Clarence is the very man to balance her own character as man’s and wife’s should do. Whether Clarence has done well in selecting her is another matter. For my own part, I had rather hoped she would have joined the celibate sisters, and have taken nurse duty for the sick and the children. It’s her natural function in life, the work she’s best fitted for; and I should have liked to see her take to it. But after all, the business of the phalanstery is not to decide vicariously for its individual members—not to thwart their natural harmless inclinations and wishes; on the contrary, we ought to allow every man and girl the fullest liberty to follow their own personal taste and judgment in every possible matter. Our power of interference as a community, I’ve always felt and said, should only extend to the prevention of obviously wrong and immoral acts, such as marriage with a person in ill-health, or of inferior mental power, or with a distinctly bad or insubordinate temper. Things of that sort, of course, are as clearly wicked as idling in work hours or marriage with a first

cousin. Olive's health, however, isn't really bad, nothing more than a very slight feebleness of constitution, as constitutions go with us ; and Eustace, who has attended her medically from her babyhood (what a dear crowing little thing she used to be in the nursery, to be sure), tells me she's perfectly fitted for the duties of her proposed situation. Ah well, ah well ; I've no doubt they'll be perfectly happy ; and the wishes of the whole phalanstery will go with them, in any case, that's certain.'

Everybody knew that whatever the hierarch said or thought was pretty sure to be approved by the unanimous voice of the entire community. Not that he was at all a dictatorial or dogmatic old man ; quite the contrary ; but his gentle kindly way had its full weight with the brothers ; and his intimate acquaintance, through the exercise of his spiritual functions, with the inmost thoughts and ideas of every individual member, man or woman, made him a safe guide in all difficult or delicate questions, as to what the decision of the council ought to be. So when, on the first Cosmos, the elder brothers assembled to transact phalansteric business, and the hierarch put in Clarence's request with the simple phrase, 'In my opinion, there is no reasonable objection,' the community at once gave in its adhesion, and formal notice was posted an hour later on the refectory door, 'The phalanstery approves the proposition of Clarence and Olive, and wishes all happiness to them and to humanity from the sacred union they now contemplate.' 'You see, dearest,' Clarence said, kissing her lips for the first time (as unwritten law demanded), now that the seal of the community had been placed upon their choice, 'you see, there can't be any harm in our contract, for the elder brothers all approve it.'

Olive smiled and sighed from the very bottom of her full heart, and clung to her lover as the ivy clings to a strong supporting oak-tree. 'Darling,' she murmured in his ear, 'if I have you to comfort me, I shall not be afraid, and we will try our best to work together for the advancement and the good of divine humanity.'

Four decades later, on a bright Cosmos morning in September, those two stood up beside one another before the altar of humanity, and heard with a thrill the voice of the hierarch uttering that solemn declaration, 'In the name of the Past, and of the Present, and of the Future, I hereby admit you, Clarence and Olive, into the holy society of Fathers and Mothers, of the United Avondale Phalanstery, in trust for humanity, whose stewards you are. May you so use and enhance the good gifts you have received from your ancestors that you may hand them on, untarnished and increased,

to the bodies and minds of your furthest descendants.' And Clarence and Olive answered humbly and reverently, 'If grace be given us, we will.'

III.

Brother Eustace, physiologist to the phalanstery, looked very grave and sad indeed as he passed from the Mothers' Room into the Conversazione in search of the hierarch. 'A child is born into the phalanstery,' he said gloomily; but his face conveyed at once a far deeper and more pregnant meaning than his mere words could carry to the ear.

The hierarch rose hastily and glanced into his dark keen eyes with an inquiring look. 'Not something amiss?' he said eagerly, with an infinite tenderness in his fatherly voice. 'Don't tell me that, Eustace. Not . . . oh, not a child that the phalanstery must not for its own sake permit to live! Oh, Eustace, not, I hope, idiotic! And I gave my consent too; I gave my consent for pretty gentle little Olive's sake! Heaven grant I was not too much moved by her prettiness and her delicacy, for I love her, Eustace, I love her like a daughter.'

'So we all love all the children of the phalanstery, Cyriac, we who are elder brothers,' said the physiologist gravely, half smiling to himself nevertheless at this quaint expression of old-world feeling on the part even of the very hierarch, whose bounden duty it was to advise and persuade a higher rule of conduct and thought than such antique phraseology implied. 'No, not idiotic; not quite so bad as that, Cyriac; not absolutely a hopeless case, but still, very serious and distressing for all that. The dear little baby has its feet turned inward. She'll be a cripple for life, I fear, and no help for it.'

Tears rose unchecked into the hierarch's soft grey eyes. 'Its feet turned inward,' he muttered sadly, half to himself. 'Feet turned inward! Oh, how terrible! This will be a frightful blow to Clarence and to Olive. Poor young things: their first-born, too. Oh, Eustace, what an awful thought that, with all the care and precaution we take to keep all causes of misery away from the precincts of the phalanstery, such trials as this must needs come upon us by the blind workings of the unconscious Cosmos! It is terrible, too terrible.'

'And yet it isn't all loss,' the physiologist answered earnestly. 'It isn't all loss, Cyriac, heart-rending as the necessity seems to us. I sometimes think that if we hadn't these occasional distressful objects on which to expend our sympathy and our sorrow, we in

our happy little communities might grow too smug, and comfortable, and material, and earthy. But things like this bring tears into our eyes, and we are the better for them in the end, depend upon it, we are the better for them. They try our fortitude, our devotion to principle, our obedience to the highest and the hardest law. Every time some poor little waif like this is born into our midst, we feel the strain of old prephalansteric emotions and fallacies of feeling dragging us steadily and cruelly down. Our first impulse is to pity the poor mother, to pity the poor child, and in our mistaken kindness to let an unhappy life go on indefinitely to its own misery and the preventible distress of all around it. We have to make an effort, a struggle, before the higher and more abstract pity conquers the lower and more concrete one. But in the end, we are all the better for it : and each such struggle and each such victory, Cyriac, paves the way for that final and truest morality when we shall do right instinctively and naturally, without any impulse on any side to do wrong in any way at all.'

' You speak wisely, Eustace,' the hierarch answered with a sad shake of his head, ' and I wish I could feel like you. I ought to, but I can't. Your functions make you able to look more dispassionately upon these things than I can. I'm afraid there's a great deal of the old Adam lingering wrongfully in me yet. And I'm still more afraid there's a great deal of the old Eve lingering even more strongly in all our mothers. It'll be a long time, I doubt me, before they'll ever consent without a struggle to the painless extinction of necessarily unhappy and imperfect lives. A long time : a very long time. Does Clarence know of this yet ? '

' Yes, I have told him. His grief is terrible. You had better go and console him as best you can.'

' I will, I will. And poor Olive ! Poor Olive ! It wrings my heart to think of her. Of course she won't be told of it, if you can help, for the probationary four decades ? '

' No, not if we can help it : but I don't know how it can ever be kept from her. She *will* see Clarence, and Clarence will certainly tell her.'

The hierarch whistled gently to himself. ' It's a sad case,' he said ruefully, ' a very sad case ; and yet I don't see how we can possibly prevent it.'

He walked slowly and deliberately into the ante-room where Clarence was seated on a sofa, his head between his hands, rocking himself to and fro in his mute misery, or stopping to groan now and then in a faint feeble inarticulate fashion. Rhoda, one of the elder sisters, held the unconscious baby sleeping in her arms, and the hierarch took it from her like a man accustomed to infants,

and looked ruthfully at the poor distorted little feet. Yes, Eustace was evidently quite right. There could be no hope of ever putting those wee twisted ankles back straight and firm into their proper place again like other people's.

He sat down beside Clarence on the sofa, and with a commiserating gesture removed the young man's hands from his pale white face. 'My dear, dear friend,' he said softly, 'what comfort or consolation can we try to give you that is not a cruel mockery? None, none, none. We can only sympathise with you and Olive: and perhaps, after all, the truest sympathy is silence.'

Clarence answered nothing for a moment, but buried his face once more in his hands and burst into tears. The men of the phalanstery were less careful to conceal their emotions than we old-time folks in these early centuries. 'Oh, dear hierarch,' he said, after a long sob, 'it is too hard a sacrifice, too hard, too terrible. I don't feel it for the baby's sake: for her, 'tis better so: she will be freed from a life of misery and dependence; but for my own sake, and oh, above all, for dear Olive's. It will kill her, hierarch; I feel sure it will kill her!'

The elder brother passed his hand with a troubled gesture across his forehead. 'But what else can we do, dear Clarence?' he asked pathetically. 'What else can we do? Would you have us bring up the dear child to lead a lingering life of misfortune, to distress the eyes of all around her, to feel herself a useless incumbrance in the midst of so many mutually helpful and serviceable and happy people? How keenly she would realise her own isolation in the joyous busy labouring community of our phalansteries! How terribly she would brood over her own misfortune when surrounded by such a world of hearty, healthy, sound-limbed useful persons! Would it not be a wicked and a cruel act to bring her up to an old age of unhappiness and imperfection? You have been in Australia, my boy, when we sent you on that plant-hunting expedition, and you have seen cripples with your own eyes, no doubt, which I have never done—thank heaven!—I who have never gone beyond the limits of the most highly civilised Euramerican countries. You have seen cripples, in those semi-civilised old colonial societies, which have lagged after us so slowly in the path of progress; and would you like your own daughter to grow up to such a life as that, Clarence? would you like her, I ask you, to grow up to such a life as that?'

Clarence clenched his right hand tightly over his left arm, and answered with a groan: 'No, hierarch; not even for Olive's sake could I wish for such an act of irrational injustice. You have trained us up to know the good from the evil, and for no personal

gratification of our deepest emotions, I hope and trust, shall we ever betray your teaching or depart from your principles. I know what it is: I saw just such a cripple once, at a great town in the heart of Central Australia—a child of eight years old, limping along lamely on her heels by her mother's side: a sickening sight: to think of it even now turns the blood in one's arteries: and I could never wish Olive's baby to live and grow up to be a thing like that. But, oh, I wish to heaven it might have been otherwise: I wish to heaven this trial might have been spared us both. Oh, hierarch, dear hierarch, the sacrifice is one that no good man or woman would wish selfishly to forego; yet for all that, our hearts, our hearts are human still; and though we may reason and may act up to our reasoning, the human feeling in us—relic of the idolatrous days or whatever you like to call it—it will not choose to be so put down and stifled: it will out, hierarch, it will out for all that, in real hot, human tears. Oh, dear, dear, kind father and brother, it will kill Olive: I know it will kill her!

'Olive is a good girl,' the hierarch answered slowly. 'A good girl, well brought up, and with sound principles. She will not flinch from doing her duty, I know, Clarence: but her emotional nature is a very delicate one, and we have reason indeed to fear the shock to her nervous system. That she will do right bravely, I don't doubt: the only danger is lest the effort to do right should cost her too dear. Whatever can be done to spare her shall be done, Clarence. It is a sad misfortune for the whole phalanstery, such a child being born to us as this: and we all sympathise with you: we sympathise with you more deeply than words can say.'

The young man only rocked up and down drearily as before, and murmured to himself, 'It will kill her, it will kill her! My Olive, my Olive, I know it will kill her.'

IV.

They didn't keep the secret of the baby's crippled condition from Olive till the four decades were over, nor anything like it. The moment she saw Clarence, she guessed at once with a woman's instinct that something serious had happened: and she didn't rest till she had found out from him all about it. Rhoda brought her the poor wee mite, carefully wrapped after the phalansteric fashion in a long strip of fine flannel, and Olive unrolled the piece until she came at last upon the small crippled feet, that looked so soft and tender and dainty and waxen in their very deformity. The young mother leant over the child a moment in speechless misery. 'Spirit of Humanity,' she whispered at length feebly, 'oh give me

strength to bear this terrible unutterable trial! It will break my heart. But I will try to bear it.'

There was something so touching in her attempted resignation that Rhoda, for the first time in her life, felt almost tempted to wish she had been born in the old wicked prephalansteric days, when they would have let the poor baby grow up to womanhood as a matter of course, and bear its own burden through life as best it might. Presently, Olive raised her head again from the crimson silken pillow. 'Clarence,' she said, in a trembling voice, pressing the sleeping baby hard against her breast, 'when will it be? How long? Is there no hope, no chance of respite?'

'Not for a long time yet, dearest Olive,' Clarence answered through his tears. 'The phalanstery will be very gentle and patient with us, we know: and brother Eustace will do everything that lies in his power, though he's afraid he can give us very little hope indeed. In any case, Olive darling, the community waits for four decades before deciding anything: it waits to see whether there is any chance for physiological or surgical relief: it decides nothing hastily or thoughtlessly: it waits for every possible improvement, hoping against hope till hope itself is hopeless. And then, if at the end of the quartet, as I fear will be the case—for we must face the worst, darling, we must face the worst—if at the end of the quartet it seems clear to brother Eustace, and the three assessor physiologists from the neighbouring phalansteries, that the dear child would be a cripple for life, we're still allowed four decades more to prepare ourselves in: four whole decades more, Olive, to take our leave of the darling baby. You'll have your baby with you for eighty days. And we must wean ourselves from her in that time, darling. We must try to wean ourselves. But oh, Olive, oh Rhoda, it's very hard: very, very, very hard.'

Olive answered not a word, but lay silently weeping and pressing the baby against her breast, with her large brown eyes fixed vacantly upon the fretted woodwork of the panelled ceiling.

'You mustn't do like that, Olive dear,' sister Rhoda said in a half-frightened voice. 'You must cry right out, and sob, and not restrain yourself, darling, or else you'll break your heart with silence and repression. Do cry aloud, there's a dear girl: do cry aloud and relieve yourself. A good cry would be the best thing on earth for you. And think, dear, how much happier it will really be for the sweet baby to sink asleep so peacefully than to live a long life of conscious inferiority and felt imperfection! What a blessing it is to think you were born in a phalansteric land, where the dear child will be happily and painlessly rid of its poor little unconscious existence, before it has reached the age

when it might begin to know its own incurable and inevitable misfortune. Oh, Olive, what a blessing that is, and how thankful we ought all to be that we live in a world where the sweet pet will be saved so much humiliation, and mortification, and misery !'

At that moment, Olive, looking within into her own wicked rebellious heart, was conscious, with a mingled glow, half shame, half indignation, that so far from appreciating the priceless blessings of her own situation, she would gladly have changed places then and there with any barbaric woman of the old semi-civilised prephalansteric days. We can so little appreciate our own mercies. It was very wrong and anti-cosmic, she knew ; very wrong, indeed, and the hierarch would have told her so at once ; but in her own woman's soul she felt she would rather be a miserable naked savage in a wattled hut, like those one saw in old books about Africa before the illumination, if only she could keep that one little angel of a crippled baby, than dwell among all the enlightenment, and knowledge, and art, and perfected social arrangements of phalansteric England without her child—her dear, helpless, beautiful baby. How truly the Founder himself had said, ' Think you there will be no more tragedies and dramas in the world when we have reformed it, nothing but one dreary dead level of monotonous content ? Ay, indeed, there will ; for that, fear not ; while the heart of man remains, there will be tragedy enough on earth and to spare for a hundred poets to take for their saddest epics.'

Olive looked up at Rhoda wistfully. ' Sister Rhoda,' she said in a timid tone, ' it may be very wicked—I feel sure it is—but do you know, I've read somewhere in old stories of the unenlightened days that a mother always loved the most afflicted of her children the best. And I can understand it now, sister Rhoda ; I can feel it here,' and she put her hand upon her poor still heart. ' If only I could keep this one dear crippled baby, I could give up all the world beside—except you, Clarence.'

' Oh, hush, darling !' Rhoda cried in an awed voice, stooping down half alarmed to kiss her pale forehead. ' You mustn't talk like that, Olive dearest. It's wicked ; it's undutiful. I know how hard it is not to repine and to rebel ; but you mustn't, Olive, you mustn't. We must each strive to bear our own burdens (with the help of the community), and not to put any of them off upon a poor, helpless, crippled little baby.'

' But our natures,' Clarence said, wiping his eyes dreamily ; ' our natures are only half attuned as yet to the necessities of the higher social existence. Of course it's very wrong and very sad, but we can't help feeling it, sister Rhoda, though we try our hardest. Remember, it's not so many generations since our fathers

would have reared the child without a thought that they were doing anything wicked—nay, rather, would even have held (so powerful is custom) that it was positively wrong to save it by preventive means from a certain life of predestined misery. Our conscience in this matter isn't yet fully formed. We feel that it's right, of course; oh yes, we know the phalanstery has ordered everything for the best; but we can't help grieving over it; the human heart within us is too unregenerate still to acquiesce without a struggle in the dictates of right and reason.'

Olive again said nothing, but fixed her eyes silently upon the grave, earnest portrait of the Founder over the carved oak mantelpiece, and let the hot tears stream their own way over her cold, white, pallid, bloodless cheek without reproof for many minutes. Her heart was too full for either speech or comfort.

V.

Eight decades passed away slowly in the Avondale Phalanstery; and day after day seemed more and more terrible to poor, weak, disconsolate Olive. The quiet refinement and delicate surroundings of their placid life seemed to make her poignant misery and long anxious term of waiting only the more intense in its sorrow and its awesomeness. Every day, the younger sisters turned as of old to their allotted round of pleasant housework; every day the elder sisters, who had earned their leisure, brought in their dainty embroidery, or their drawing materials, or their other occupations, and tried to console her, or rather to condole with her, in her great sorrow. She couldn't complain of any unkindness; on the contrary, all the brothers and sisters were sympathy itself; while Clarence, though he tried hard not to be *too* idolatrous to her (which is wrong and antisocial, of course), was still overflowing with tenderness and consideration for her in their common grief. But all that seemed merely to make things worse. If only somebody would have been cruel to her; if only the hierarch would have scolded her, or the elder sisters have shown any distant coldness, or the other girls have been wanting in sisterly sympathy, she might have got angry or brooded over her wrongs; whereas, now, she could do nothing save cry passively with a vain attempt at resignation. It was nobody's fault; there was nobody to be angry with; there was nothing to blame except the great impersonal laws and circumstances of the Cosmos, which it would be rank impiety and wickedness to question or to gainsay. So she endured in silence, loving only to sit with Clarence's hand in hers, and the dear doomed baby lying peacefully upon the stole in her

lap. It was inevitable, and there was no use repining; for so profoundly had the phalanstery schooled the minds and natures of those two unhappy young parents (and all their compeers), that, grieve as they might, they never for one moment dreamt of attempting to relax or set aside the fundamental principles of phalansteric society in these matters.

By the kindly rule of the phalanstery, every mother had complete freedom from household duties for two years after the birth of her child; and Clarence, though he would not willingly have given up his own particular work in the grounds and garden, spent all the time he could spare from his short daily task (every one worked five hours every lawful day, and few worked longer, save on special emergencies) by Olive's side. At last, the eight decades passed slowly away, and the fatal day for the removal of little Rosebud arrived. Olive called her Rosebud because, she said, she was a sweet bud that could never be opened into a full-blown rose. All the community felt the solemnity of the painful occasion; and by common consent the day (Darwin, December 20) was held as an intra-phalansteric fast by the whole body of brothers and sisters.

On that terrible morning Olive rose early, and dressed herself carefully in a long white stole with a broad black border of Greek key pattern. But she had not the heart to put any black upon dear little Rosebud; and so she put on her fine flannel wrapper, and decorated it instead with the pretty coloured things that Veronica and Philomela had worked for her, to make her baby as beautiful as possible on this its last day in a world of happiness. The other girls helped her and tried to sustain her, crying all together at the sad event. ‘She’s a sweet little thing,’ they said to one another as they held her up to see how she looked. ‘If only it could have been her reception to-day instead of her removal!’ But Olive moved through them all with stoical resignation—dry-eyed and parched in the throat, yet saying not a word save for necessary instructions and directions to the nursing sisters. The iron of her creed had entered into her very soul.

After breakfast, brother Eustace and the hierarch came sadly in their official robes into the lesser infirmary. Olive was there already, pale and trembling, with little Rosebud sleeping peacefully in the hollow of her lap. What a picture she looked, the wee dear thing, with the hothouse flowers from the conservatory that Clarence had brought to adorn her, fastened neatly on to her fine flannel robe! The physiologist took out a little phial from his pocket, and began to open a sort of inhaler of white muslin. At the same moment, the grave, kind old hierarch stretched out

his hands to take the sleeping baby from its mother's arms. Olive shrank back in terror, and clasped the child softly to her heart. 'No, no, let me hold her myself, dear hierarch,' she said, without flinching. 'Grant me this one last favour. Let me hold her myself.' It was contrary to all fixed rules; but neither the hierarch nor any one else there present had the heart to refuse that beseeching voice on so supreme and spirit-rending an occasion.

Brother Eustace poured the chloroform solemnly and quietly on to the muslin inhaler. 'By resolution of the phalanstery,' he said, in a voice husky with emotion, 'I release you, Rosebud, from a life for which you are naturally unfitted. In pity for your hard fate, we save you from the misfortune you have never known, and will never now experience.' As he spoke, he held the inhaler to the baby's face, and watched its breathing grow fainter and fainter, till at last, after a few minutes, it faded gradually and entirely away. The little one had slept from life into death, painlessly and happily, even as they looked.

Clarence, tearful but silent, felt the baby's pulse for a moment, and then, with a burst of tears, shook his head bitterly. 'It is all over,' he cried with a loud cry. 'It is all over; and we hope and trust it is better so.'

But Olive still said nothing.

The physiologist turned to her with an anxious gaze. Her eyes were open, but they looked blank and staring into vacant space. He took her hand, and it felt limp and powerless. 'Great heaven,' he cried, in evident alarm, 'what is this? Olive, Olive, our dear Olive, why don't you speak?'

Clarence sprang up from the ground, where he had knelt to try the dead baby's pulse, and took her unresisting wrist anxiously in his. 'Oh, brother Eustace,' he cried passionately, 'help us, save us; what's the matter with Olive? she's fainting, she's fainting! I can't feel her heart beat, no, not ever so little.'

Brother Eustace let the pale white hand drop listlessly from his grasp upon the pale white stole beneath, and answered slowly and distinctly: 'She isn't fainting, Clarence; not fainting, my dear brother. The shock and the fumes of chloroform together have been too much for the action of the heart. She's dead too, Clarence; our dear, dear sister; she's dead too.'

Clarence flung his arms wildly round Olive's neck, and listened eagerly with his ear against her bosom to hear her heart beat. But no sound came from the folds of the simple black-bordered stole; no sound from anywhere save the suppressed sobs of the frightened women who huddled closely together in the corner, and gazed horror-stricken upon the two warm fresh corpses.

'She was a brave girl,' brother Eustace said at last, wiping his eyes and composing her hands reverently. 'Olive was a brave girl, and she died doing her duty, without one murmur against the sad necessity that fate had unhappily placed upon her. No sister on earth could wish to die more nobly than by thus sacrificing her own life and her own weak human affections on the altar of humanity for the sake of her child and of the world at large.'

'And yet, I sometimes almost fancy,' the hierarch murmured with a violent effort to control his emotions, 'when I see a scene like this, that even the unenlightened practices of the old era may not have been quite so bad as we usually think them, for all that. Surely an end such as Olive's is a sad and a terrible end to have forced upon us as the final outcome and natural close of all our modern phalansteric civilisation.'

'The ways of the Cosmos are wonderful,' said brother Eustace solemnly; 'and we, who are no more than atoms and mites upon the surface of its meanest satellite, cannot hope so to order all things after our own fashion that all its minutest turns and chances may approve themselves to us as right in our own eyes.'

The sisters all made instinctively the reverential genuflexion. 'The Cosmos is infinite,' they said together, in the fixed formula of their cherished religion. 'The Cosmos is infinite, and man is but a parasite upon the face of the least among its satellite members. May we so act as to further all that is best within us, and to fulfil our own small place in the system of the Cosmos with all becoming reverence and humility! In the name of universal Humanity. So be it.'

J. ARBUTHNOT WILSON.

‘ Vale, Amor ! ’

SWEETHEART ! if love obtained must slay desire,
 And quench the light and warmth of passion’s fire,
 If you are weary of the ways of Love,
 And fain would end the many cares thereof,
 I prithee tell me so, that I may seek
 Some place to die in ere I grow too weak
 To look my last on your beloved face ;
 Yea, tell me all ! the gods may yet have grace
 And pity enough to let me quickly die
 Some brief while after we have said ‘ good-bye,’
 A sickening utterance freighted with despair
 To all who find one face, one form too fair ;
 Nay, I have known it well for many days,
 You have grown tired of my too tender ways,
 Love’s kisses weary you, love’s eager words—
 Old as the hills, and sweet as singing-birds—
 Seem to you now but one dull monotone,
 And chatingly you strive to be alone,
 Alone, self-centred, from love’s bondage free,
 And all is gain for you in losing me—
 I know it—therefore speak not ! I would fain
 Hear no word from those lips of yours again,
 Lest some harsh utterance coming forth from thence,
 Should scare my soul from every sound and sense ;
 Let me depart, remembering only this—
 That once you loved me, and that once your kiss
 Crown’d me with joy intense enough to last
 Through all my life till that brief life be past ;
 And so farewell—think you no more of me,
 Glad and content am I that this should be,
 For were I doomed to watch your passion fade
 Like golden sunflowers dying in the shade,
 I had grown mad with grief, and some strange thing,
 The fruit of my most bitter suffering,
 Some cruel deed of darkness and despair,
 Might have been done before you could beware
 Of me, my wrath, and what I thought my wrong ;
 But ‘tis not so ; I have but heard a song
 Most infinitely sweet—such songs must end
 Even as Life in Death. My more than friend !
 More than the inmost centre of my heart,
 Grant me one prayer, the last before we part,
 ‘Tis this—forget me ! never, never more
 Turn to look back on what has gone before,
 Or say ‘ she lov’d me once,’ or ‘ she was fair’ ;
 The past is past for ever—have no care
 Or thought for me at all—no tear, no sigh
 Or small regret, for, Dearest, I shall die
 And dream of you i’ the dark beneath the grass,
 And o’er my head perchance your feet may pass
 Lulling me faster into sleep profound
 Among the fairies of the fruitful ground ;
 Love opens wide his golden prison-door,
 Be free, sweetheart ! Remember me no more.

The Case of Mr. Van Klugen.

I.

MORE years ago than I care to specify, I was one of the officials of the Hemingford county gaol. In point of fact, I was neither more nor less than a warder. I had been well brought up and tolerably well educated, but a persistent course of wild-oats sowing, involving the loss of three or four good situations, had so disgusted my people, that by common consent they turned their backs on me, and wished me *bon voyage* on my journey to the deuce. When, therefore, Sir Magnus Marks, an old friend of my father, as a last resource offered me the post of warder at Hemingford gaol, I accepted the situation more to spite my stuck-up relatives than out of any pleasure which the prospect afforded me. However, as it happened, I found the post more to my liking than I had expected, and I retained it for upwards of a couple of years till, in fact, something much better came in my way.

As a matter of course, many queer things came under my notice during the time I was a warder. I could relate the particulars of many strange incidents and out-of-the-way experiences which the world outside the gaol never heard of; but for the present I will confine myself to one such incident, which I now feel at liberty to make public, the chief actor in it having, not long ago, broken through the walls of his earthly prison and secured the freedom of the grave.

The Van Klugen case, as it was called at the time, had been the chief topic of conversation in Hemingsford society from the day the accused man was committed on the charge of wilful murder, up to the time when the assizes took place. If, here and there, you met with one individual who professed to believe in the innocence of the prisoner, you met twenty who were fully prepared to vouch for his guilt. This readiness to put the worst construction on the case was no doubt due in some measure to the unpopularity of Mr. Van Klugen. That he was rich was a well-known fact, but from the day he settled down on a small estate which he had bought in the neighbourhood of Hemingford he had lived the life of an utter recluse, shunning all society, and being rarely seen beyond the precincts of his own park.

As a fact, Mr. Van Klugen's days and nights were devoted to the pursuit of abstract science. On an eminence at the back of his house he had built a small observatory, in which he had fixed a powerful telescope, together with other instruments for observing

and registering the transit of heavenly bodies. There were dark rumours of a locked-up room in the house itself, in which were furnaces and crucibles, and articles of strange shape, designed for unknown uses, and from which on winter evenings there often proceeded weird, unearthly noises, as it might be of demoniac laughter, and subtle deadly odours; while from the low, wide-mouthed chimney lambent tongues of many-coloured flame were seen to dance and quiver as though from a veritable opening into Tophet itself. Add to all this the fact that the house in which Mr. Van Klugen lived had stood empty for twenty years before he became its tenant, its reputation being tainted by the presence of an undoubted ghost, and it will be at once understood why that gentleman was never likely to become popular among a provincial community, where to be different from your neighbours was to be something that you ought not to be.

The assizes came on in due course. Mr. Van Klugen stood his trial, was brought in guilty, and was cast for death.

The case was a somewhat singular one, but may be summarised here in a few words. Mr. Van Klugen was accused and found guilty of poisoning a young lady who was his ward, and by whose death he would benefit to the extent of several thousand pounds. The young lady had been ailing for a day or two, but no medical aid had been considered necessary. One morning she was found dead in her bed. The post-mortem examination brought to light unmistakable traces of poison. No cause could be shown why the young lady should have committed suicide. In Mr. Van Klugen's laboratory were found numerous specimens of deadly poisons, together with a number of notes in his writing having reference to certain toxicological experiments of recent date. A discharged servant swore to having heard high words pass between her master and the young lady about a week before the death of the latter. Circumstantial evidence has sealed the fate of many a man, and it sealed the fate of Mr. Van Klugen.

It was not till after his condemnation that I made the acquaintance of Mr. Van Klugen. As a prisoner under sentence of death he was never allowed to be left alone, and it fell to my lot to be one of the two night-warders appointed to watch him.

Before going any further I think it right to state that, from all I saw of Mr. Van Klugen, I believed him then, as I firmly believe him now, to have been altogether innocent of the crime for which he was condemned. In this belief, as I have since found, I am by no means singular. Many men, cleverer and more far-sighted in such matters than I can profess to be, have expressed themselves to the same effect.

The prisoner's age was put down in the calendar as fifty-five, but he hardly looked it. He was a tall, dignified-looking man, with grizzled hair and moustache, and with large grey piercing eyes. From the moment that he was put under my care I seemed to take to him, as the saying is, as I never took to any prisoner before or after. He was as kindly, affable, and cheerful in the condemned cell as he might have been in his own drawing-room, and he treated me and my brother-warders with the genial courtesy of a high-bred gentleman whom no circumstances have power to alter.

He spent a great part of each day in reading and writing. The books which he had asked for and had obtained permission to have were nearly all on scientific and abstruse subjects, and he read them, and took notes of different points in them, as calmly as though he had many years' lease of life still before him. He was a great smoker, and as a special privilege he was allowed the solace of his favourite meerschaum. He had never been married, and after his condemnation he had but one visitor—his mother. She was a very little, withered-up old lady, but remarkably active and vivacious for her age. She was allowed to visit the gaol for an hour every other day, on which occasions the conversations between herself and her son were always conducted in German.

These meetings had little or nothing of a sentimental character about them. Mother and son kissed each other when they met, and again when they parted, but there were no tears or repinings. Their talk was quiet and earnest, but never lachrymose.

Without flattery to myself I may say that I was better educated, and had been brought up in a better class of society, than any of my fellow-warders at the gaol. Mr. Van Klugen was not long in discovering this, and when he was tired of reading or writing or brooding silently, he would not unfrequently light his meerschaum and seek relaxation in a chat with his keepers. Me he favoured especially in that way, and our talk was on a hundred different topics, for Mr. Van Klugen had one of those omnivorous intellects to which nothing seems to come amiss. The great political questions of the day, the petty gossip of our little town, my personal history and adventures, the latest scientific discovery, or the last new novel—he seemed to have an equal relish for one and all. The more I saw of him the more I marvelled.

I never heard Mr. Van Klugen make any allusion to the crime of which he had been found guilty, except on one occasion, and even then I think he was unaware that he was speaking aloud. ‘Poor Julie!’ I heard him mutter, ‘poor headstrong Julie! So self-willed, and yet with such a noble heart! To think that I

would have hurt a hair of thy head! And yet they say that I poisoned thee! Fools!

II.

MR. VAN KLUGEN was regular in all his habits, and in none more so than in his time of going to rest and getting up. As soon as the prison clock chimed the half-hour past eleven he ceased from whatever he might be engaged upon, and having taken off some portion of his clothing, he lay down on the hard and narrow pallet provided for his use. Ten minutes later he was to all appearance fast asleep. He would invariably awake at five almost to the minute, and having bathed and partaken of a cup of coffee, he would at once sit down to his books; nor did the consciousness that a certain morning was drawing near with terrible strides seem to abate in the least the ardour of his studies.

That fatal morning was but five times removed when night came round once more, and once more Mr. Van Klugen lay down to his rest. I and my fellow-warder, Stockley, were on duty as usual. It was a few minutes past twelve when, having occasion to cross the cell for some purpose, I chanced to take a closer glance than usual at the face of the sleeping man, which was turned to the wall and hidden in part from me. What I saw made me turn cold from head to foot. The face of Mr. Van Klugen looked for all the world like the face of a dead man. My cry of alarm brought my comrade to my side. The first thing we did was to turn our prisoner over on his back. His extremities were cold and pulseless, but the body was still warm, and the faintest possible beating of the heart showed that he was still alive. The eyes were glazed, and sunken in their orbits, and everything seemed to indicate that the man's last moment was at hand. I rang the alarm-bell, and in a very short time both the governor and the doctor were on the spot. The first idea of all of us was that our prisoner had poisoned himself; but how, when, and with what? The doctor was evidently nonplussed. He opened a vein, and ordered his limbs to be chafed, and tried a few other simple remedies, but without any apparent effect. At the end of a quarter of an hour the condition of the prisoner was to all appearance exactly the same as when he was first discovered. The governor and the doctor looked at each other in dismay.

Suddenly, and without a moment's warning as it seemed, the light of a living soul flashed back into the glazed upturned eyes, and presently a voice, hollow, faint, and with a sort of far-away sound in it, startled us all, as though it were indeed an utterance from the tomb.

'What the deuce are you good people doing here?—Mr. Governor and Monsieur le Médecin, and my two sturdy men-at-arms! I am not worth this pother that's made about me. Thank you all the same.'

'Glad you have come round,' said the doctor. 'Some kind of fit, I suppose?'

'Possibly,' said Van Klugen drily. 'In any case it can hardly matter to a moribund man like me. It would only have been common charity to have left me undisturbed.'

The governor, who was a man of few words, shook his head and smiled a faint dissent.

'You were afraid your next Monday's show might have been spoiled, eh? It would be a very lame affair without the presence of the tragedian-in-chief. Your groundlings would have just cause to consider themselves aggrieved.'

The doctor felt his pulse. 'You are much better,' he said. 'I will send you a composing draught.'

'Which I shall decline to take,' answered the prisoner. 'Gentlemen, I am better now, and would be alone.' Thereupon he turned his face to the wall and shut his eyes. The governor and doctor felt there was nothing left for them but to retire.

Mr. Van Klugen seemed as usual next morning, and made no allusion to the scene of the previous night. His mother made her customary visit in the course of the day.

About nine o'clock next evening Mr. Van Klugen abruptly closed the big book he had been reading, took a few turns round his cell, and then spoke, addressing himself both to me and my fellow-warder Stockley.

'You thought that I was very ill last night, did you not?' he asked. 'And you imagined that I was going to die? Well, I want to be ill to-night in exactly the same way. I say advisedly that I want to be. At twelve o'clock precisely I shall begin to be ill; at two o'clock precisely I shall begin to recover. Do not be alarmed; I am not going to commit suicide. On that point I give you my word of honour. Now, I have here two ten-pound notes, of which I will ask each of you to accept one, the sole condition being that you do not disturb me in any way between the hours of twelve and two, but leave me to come round entirely of my own accord. You will be doing a kindness to a dying man, and will at the same time to a certain extent benefit yourselves. What say you?'

It was a strange, a very strange proposal. My mate and I laid our heads together and talked it over in whispers. Both of

us were poor men, and ten pounds each would be a little godsend to us. In brief, after some further conversation with our prisoner, and after he had again given us his solemn assurance that it was not his intention to commit suicide, we agreed to the offer. The money was handed over to us at once, and we awaited the hour of twelve with an anxiety which we could scarcely conceal.

It came at last, boomed out slowly and solemnly by the prison clock. Mr. Van Klugen had retired to his pallet at half-past eleven, as he always did, and to all appearance had gone off into one of his usual quiet sleeps. The time went on. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed, and the sleeping man stirred not. I rose and crossed to the side of his bed, so as to observe him more closely. As on the preceding night, he looked more like a corpse than a man with the slightest breath of life in him ; indeed, it was only through having seen him present the same appearance before, that I could believe him to be still alive. Both I and my mate were horribly frightened, and at that moment we would gladly have given up our twenty pounds if by so doing we could have brought our charge back to consciousness. The glazed eyes, the pinched nostrils, the drawn-in cheeks, the cadaverous complexion, like that of a man several days dead, and the deadly cold hands, were enough to frighten anyone. I laid my hand on his heart, while Stockley held a small mirror close above his lips. What a relief it was to find that he still breathed, although that breathing was of the faintest ! For two hours he remained without the slightest apparent change, while we sat anxiously by him. Once or twice we debated in a whisper whether we had not better summon the doctor, but our debate came to nothing. We both declared afterwards that those were the longest two hours we had ever spent in our lives. It was with a sigh of relief that we heard the prison clock strike two.

We still sat by our charge, watching him anxiously. A few minutes later, and the first faint signs of returning consciousness became apparent. A minute or two later still he opened his eyes, sat up, and looked around. ‘I am glad to find that to-night you have acted like sensible men,’ were his first words. ‘You see that I have kept my promise by coming back to you. You have done me a very great service, and I thank you for it.’ He lay down, turned his face to the wall, and went off to sleep like a child.

III.

WHEN Stockley and I went on duty next evening, neither of us anticipated that we should be subjected to a repetition of our

previous temptation. But so it was. Mr. Van Klugen pleaded hard. No harm had come of our acceding to his request, he said, and no harm would come of our acceding to it once again. There was another ten-pound note ready for each of us. The arrangement would be precisely the same as before. From twelve till two he would remain unconscious; at two o'clock he would resume the functions of ordinary existence; that was all. Need it be said that for the second time the temptation was too much for us? Mr. Van Klugen had his way.

At five minutes past twelve he was again to all appearance a dead man. The symptoms were the same in every respect as those of the two preceding nights. Our watch was not without anxiety, but we had become familiarised in some measure with the features of the case, and had less fear as to the result. At a few minutes past two, signs of returning life were visible, and both Stockley and I thanked our stars that the affair was safely over.

Mr. Van Klugen sat up in bed and stared around like a man utterly bewildered. Judging from the way he looked at Stockley and me, he might never have seen either of us before. Then he put his hands to his head, as though trying to collect his thoughts. ‘It is all true, then—a dismal reality!’ I heard him mutter. And with that he groaned deeply, and fell back on his pillow.

This behaviour on the part of our prisoner surprised Stockley and me so much that we knew not what to make of it. ‘Would you like to see the doctor, sir? or the governor? or the chaplain?’ I asked, in a helpless sort of way. ‘They are all within call, and would gladly come if you care to see them.’

‘No, no; I want nothing, nor nobody. Only to be let alone,’ he answered. ‘And now I am indeed alone,’ he added pitifully. After that he lay for several minutes with his face buried in the pillow, and neither spoke nor moved.

‘Going to make a confession, maybe,’ whispered Stockley.

I shook my head. I was a firm believer in Mr. Van Klugen’s innocence. ‘Only losing his nerve a bit,’ I whispered back, ‘through being shut up so long.’

After a little while the condemned man got up and began to pace from end to end of his cell, with something of the air and manner of a caged animal. ‘I must have some brandy or I shall go mad,’ he presently exclaimed. ‘Is there such a thing to be had in this cursed hole?’

‘I will make inquiry, sir,’ I said. With that I rang the bell, and sent a message to the governor.

Ten minutes later a warder with a small decanter of brandy

knocked at the cell door. The prisoner seized on the liquor eagerly, and drank off two-thirds of a tumblerful at a draught, as though it were so much water. After that he took to pacing his cell again. And so the night slowly wore itself away.

Once in the course of the night he stopped in his walk by the little table and opened one or two of the big tomes, within whose leaves he had been wont to find a solace for so many weary hours. He stopped and opened them merely to glance at their title-pages, and shut them again with an impatient ‘Pish !’

Every time the prison clock struck the hour he stood still and counted the strokes. Just as the clock had done striking six he laid a hand suddenly on my shoulder.

‘At what hour on Monday next does my—my little affair come off?’ he asked. His dry, bloodless lips seemed as if they could scarcely frame the question.

‘At nine o’clock, sir, to the minute.’

‘A—h !’ It was more a sigh than an exclamation. With that he resumed his endless walk.

Neither Stockley nor I was sorry when the time came to go off duty.

I went home and to bed, but only to dream of the singular change in Mr. Van Klugen; and when I woke up he was still uppermost in my thoughts.

When Stockley and I went on duty next evening, Mr. Van Klugen glanced up at us with a sort of moody indifference, but did not accost us as he had always been in the habit of doing. This of itself showed how great was the change from the kindly, cheerful, and philosophic gentleman to whom both of us had ‘taken’ as we never took to a prisoner before or after.

All that night he hardly spoke to us, neither did he so much as open one of his favourite books. Even his meerschaum seemed to have lost its charm. At intervals he slept fitfully and feverishly; at other times he sat brooding in silence, or paced from end to end of the little cell with an unwearying savage persistency that was dreadful to look upon. Not less marked was the change which a few hours seemed to have wrought in his personal appearance. His face had suddenly become worn and haggard. The thick brows had come down and half hid the bloodshot eyes below them. There was an occasional nervous twitching of the mouth and a slight trembling of the hands which I had never noticed before. Mind and body, Mr. Van Klugen seemed an utterly changed man.

A long weary night, and then Sunday dawned peaceful and bright. The fresh air, the sunshine, the happy chirping of the

birds, had never seemed so sweet and pleasant to me as they did that morning as I walked down the long dull street homeward from the gaol. Only one more night, and my thankless task would be at an end.

When I went on duty on Sunday evening I was told that the prisoner had had no visitors whatever during the day. Not even his mother had come to take her final farewell of him. It was strange, very strange. I found him very pale and haggard, and to all appearance almost worn out from want of sleep and an almost total inability to take food of any kind. His strength had to be kept up by stimulants administered under the doctor's directions, for which, indeed, he craved eagerly. About midnight he asked for writing materials, and was busily engaged with his pen till after three o'clock. Then he lay down in his clothes and slept, with many uneasy moaning fits and starts, till six. A few minutes later the chaplain knocked at the door.

Mr. Van Klugen had written two letters in the course of the night. These he now sealed up and gave into the chaplain's hands. One of the letters was to be opened by that gentleman a week after his (Mr. Van Klugen's) death. The second letter was addressed to 'Herman Trevis, Esq., The Pavement, Waveney Mallow,' and it was the prisoner's earnest request that this letter, together with a mourning ring in black and gold which he took off his finger, should be delivered by a trustworthy person into the hands of Mr. Trevis himself as soon after all was over as might be convenient. Such wishes are sacred.

Three hours later Mr. Van Klugen was no longer among the living.

IV.

On the Thursday morning following I was sent for specially by the governor. With him I found the chaplain. They wanted me to find out Mr. Herman Trevis, and deliver into his hands the letter and the ring left for him by Mr. Van Klugen. The distance to Waveney Mallow was forty miles, and I was instructed to start by the first train. I was glad enough to have such a holiday, and all my expenses paid into the bargain.

I reached Waveney Mallow in due course, and was not long in finding Mr. Trevis's domicile. It was an old-fashioned red-brick house, standing back from the street in a courtyard of its own. I rang the bell, asked for Mr. Trevis, and was ushered into a small anteroom.

Presently there entered to me an elderly lady, handsome but

careworn. There was a troubled look in her eyes, and an apprehensive something in her air and manner, as though she lived in momentary dread of hearing some unwelcome tidings.

I asked for Mr. Trevis. Her son, she said, was away in London. Would not she do in his stead?

I was sorry, but my instructions were to see Mr. Trevis himself. If that gentleman was in London, to London I must go. Would she kindly furnish me with her son's address?

'Yes, of course I will,' she replied, 'if it is really requisite that you should have it. But—I hope there is nothing wrong—that you have no unpleasant business with my son, which renders it necessary that you should see him in person?'

'Nothing unpleasant, madam, so far as I know. Merely to deliver into his hands a letter from a gentleman who died a few days ago.'

Her face brightened at once. 'In that case I will go and write you out Herman's address,' she said. 'Meanwhile you won't object to a glass of sherry.'

She left the room. Just as she reached the door there was a rush of light footsteps down the passage, and a girlish voice exclaimed, 'Oh, mamma, here's another box from Herman, and all for me this time! Such lovely things! And a tiny casket with a locket and earrings! Diamonds and rubies—nothing less. How kind of him not to forget us now that his speculations are turning out so well.'

'Hush, my darling! Don't speak so loud. Pray Heaven that Herman be not rushing into deeper misfortunes than any we have known yet.'

The next train took me up to town, and twenty minutes after my arrival there I was set down at the entrance to Gray's Inn.

Mr. Trevis's rooms proved to be on the second floor, up a narrow stone staircase. I had just set my foot on the bottom step when I had to make way for a lady who was coming slowly down. You might have knocked me over with a straw when, on looking up, I saw that the lady was none other than the mother of Mr. Van Klugen. There was a smile on her face as she came down. She passed close in front of me, but without recognising me.

Having found Mr. Trevis's rooms, I knocked, and then, in obedience to a summons from within, I opened the door and went in. The room in which I found myself was an ordinary place enough, scantily, even shabbily furnished. Its only occupant was Mr. Trevis himself, who was reading as I opened the door. He was a man of about five-and-thirty, with short black hair, an

aquiline nose, and a thick drooping moustache—a man whom I had certainly never seen before. He shut his book and started to his feet.

'Hollo, Denvil! what on earth brings you here?' he exclaimed.

I was so dumbfounded to find he knew me by name, that for a moment or two I had not a word to say.

'And how's Stockley? and Stockley's wife? and Stockley's baby?' he went on. 'But sit down, man, and recover yourself a bit. That staircase of mine is an ugly pull.'

I suppose I must have looked very ridiculous as I sat staring at him in a helpless sort of way, for he broke into a laugh.

'And now tell me what has brought you so far from home,' he said, 'so far from dull little Hemingford and the precincts of the county gaol.'

'I've brought a letter for you from the late Mr. Van Klugen,' I said, hardly knowing whether I stood on my head or my heels.

His face darkened a little. 'From the late Mr. Van Klugen! Just so. Well, as Propertius said long ago, "sooner or later death comes to all."

I handed him the letter. 'And I have here a ring,' I said, 'which Mr. Van Klugen took off his finger and wished to have sent to you only a few hours before—before you know what, sir.'

He took the ring eagerly and pressed it twice to his lips.

'Thanks—a thousand thanks!' he said. 'It was really very kind and thoughtful of Van Klugen to send me the ring. To me it is beyond price.' He tried to put it on his little finger, but it was too small. He looked greatly disappointed. Then he pressed the ring to his lips again and put it quietly in his pocket.

'And now for the letter,' he said.

He opened and read it. 'It has been done already,' he remarked in a low voice, more as if speaking to himself than to me. 'He might have felt sure that I should not fail in aught that I promised. *They* will never know the sting of poverty again.'

I rose to go. Mr. Trevis rose also and crossed to the window, where he stood for a minute or two looking out into the quiet square. 'And—and Mr. Van Klugen—in what manner did he meet his fate?' he asked, with his back still towards me.

'With courage and resignation.'

'That is well; that is very well,' he said. Then he sighed deeply, and stood for a little while without speaking. I coughed as a gentle reminder that it was time for me to go. He turned and

took out his purse. ‘Here is a sovereign for your expenses,’ he said, ‘and here’s a trifling douceur for yourself.’

I pocketed the money, thanked him, and took my leave.

V.

Two days later I was sent for by Mr. Barker, the gaol chaplain, for whom I had acted as amanuensis on more than one occasion previously.

‘I have here a confession,’ he said, ‘which was written out by Mr. Van Klugen the night before his execution. It is a singular document—so singular, indeed, that I can only set it down as the product of a mind diseased and thoroughly out of tune. Before allowing the original to pass out of my hands I am desirous of having a copy made for my private use. That task I now entrust to you, relying implicitly upon your discretion to keep the contents of the document a secret from every one.’

I took the confession, and after I had finished Mr. Barker’s copy, I thought that I might as well make a duplicate for myself. It is the contents of that duplicate which, after the lapse of a quarter of a century, and when neither Mr. Trevis, Mr. Barker, nor the governor is any longer among the living, that I now take upon myself to make public, leaving the reader, without further comment, to draw from it whatever conclusion may seem to him most feasible under the circumstances.

THE CONFESSION.

‘Hemingford Gaol: Monday, August 4, 18—.

‘The clock has just struck twelve, and nine hours are all that are now left to me in this world. There is a dull sound of hammering in the distance, the meaning of which I cannot mistake. But it is early yet, and the hangman is doubtless sleeping the sleep of the just.

‘I can hardly bring the thought home to my mind that I am really and truly to die when next the clock strikes nine. Yet such is the lamentable fact, and I must hurry over my confession—if confession it can be called.

‘Were I a humorist I could find food for mirth, though it were of the grimdest, in my present predicament—or rather in the thought how every one around me is being fooled without one of them so much as suspecting it. Neither the worthy governor, nor the chaplain, nor the sheriff, nor the hangman dreams for one moment that they are about to carry out what is termed “the last sentence of the law” on the wrong man. And yet such is the

indubitable fact. At nine o'clock this summer morning they are going to hang, not Felix Van Klugen, but Herbert Trevis ; but they don't know it, and they never would know it were I to die without penning these lines. Those who read them will probably disbelieve what I am about to set down. But I cannot help that. My object, even had I the requisite time and inclination, is not to strive to make converts, but to leave behind me a simple record of facts.

'To begin at the beginning. I was the only son of well-to-do parents, and having in addition certain expectations from a rich uncle, I was brought up to no profession, nor, indeed, ever taught to do a day's work in my life. For some years I led an irregular and dissipated life in London and Paris. My uncle's death proved the weakness of the foundation on which my expectations had been based. He died very rich, but my name was not even mentioned in his will. Shortly afterwards my father died, comparatively impoverished. A paltry two thousand was all that came to me on his demise. As a matter of course it did not last me very long. When my last sovereign was spent I bethought me of certain coupons which my mother had placed in my hands for security. They constituted the provision left her by my father for her old age. I disposed of them at their market value, and appropriated the proceeds. (A confession is not worth calling by that name when it hides anything. I trust that whoever may read these lines in time to come will give me credit for my frankness.)

'Later on, by means of a fictitious document, I obtained possession of my sister's little dowry. It went the way of all that had gone before, and one morning I woke up to the consciousness that a solitary sovereign was the last coin I had in the world. I could neither work nor beg, and there was nothing more that I could conveniently "convey." A life of poverty and privation was not to be thought of. I made up my mind that there was nothing left for me but to go through the ceremony of the Happy Dispatch. It did not take me long to arrive at this conclusion. I wrote a letter to my mother and sister, to be forwarded to them after all was over, in which I told them everything, and asked them to try to forgive me. Then I burnt sundry papers which would not bear reading by other eyes, and after that I sallied forth into the streets for the last time. Shunning my club and the sight of anyone I knew, I took my dinner all alone at a French *café* at the back of Regent Street. The change out of my last sovereign I gave to a poor girl at the corner; then I lighted my cigar and walked slowly back to my rooms.

'I must now go back to an illness which I had some five years

before this time. It was a fever of some kind, and it nearly cost me my life. I had taken a turn for the better and was slowly recovering, when one night, as I lay asleep, I went through a very strange experience. I became conscious that, without being dead, or, indeed, without any exercise of will on my part, my inner self—my ego—my spiritual essence, or whatever you may choose to term it, had quitted its earthly tenement for a while, and was wandering aimlessly through space, like a ghost new fledged in search of a home. In the state in which I was I knew neither fear nor elation, and wonder was an unknown quality. I was as one in a dream, and was as little trammelled by the ordinary physical laws of the universe as dreamers usually are. But I had a vivid consciousness of life—of a spiritual etherealised kind of life—which far exceeded anything I had ever experienced in dreams. At one moment I saw my body lying like a dead husk that I had cast behind me; the next, by the merest exercise of my will, I was in the hut of an Australian friend. He was smoking and reading over once more the well-thumbed letter I had sent him half a year before. Another instant, and I was back with my mother and sister in the old home at Waveney Mallow. My mother was about to put out the lamp for the night, my sister was touching a few minor chords on the piano. "Thank Heaven that my boy is better!" I heard my mother say. "To-night I can go to bed with a thankful heart." But both friendship and affection seemed dead within me, and I passed on utterly unmoved. At the end of about an hour and a half I came back to ordinary life as from a deeper sleep than common, to find that I had frightened both doctor and nurse, who had given me up as a dead man.

'This strange experience had a considerable effect upon my mind at the time; but the life I was then leading quickly wore away all serious impressions. I looked upon it as something that would never happen again, and strove to forget it as much as possible.

'Not till three years had passed away, and I was recovering from a sharp attack of delirium tremens, did anything of the same kind happen to me again. I was dreadfully low and weak at the time, and felt that I would almost sooner die than undergo the horrors of such a recovery. It was while in this desponding mood that I fell into a trance (if I may so call it) similar to the one which I have already described, and with experiences almost precisely identical in character. I came out of it as before, thought it strange, and with returning health forgot all about it.

'I now come to the night of which I have already made mention,

when I found myself at the end of fortune's tether, and had made up my mind that there was no resource left me save suicide.

‘When I got back to my rooms after dining at the *café*, I sat with my feet on the fender, to smoke a last pipe and muse awhile. The pistol was ready to my hand, and I had vowed to myself that the very moment the clock struck one I would blow out my brains. I suppose I must have gone off to sleep while sitting thus, as the next thing that I remember is finding myself—or rather my incorporeal essence—dissociated from my body, and that without any volition of my own in the matter.

‘I found myself in a large and sombre room, lined with books and lighted by a solitary lamp. On the opposite side of the table was seated the shade of a man whom I never remembered having seen before—a grave, handsome, middle-aged personage. His figure was surrounded by a sort of faint halo of white misty light: probably my own figure presented a similar appearance, but I did not know it. What I did know, by some intuitive process which I cannot explain, was that I had been drawn thither by the superior will-power of the figure before me. I then learnt for the first time that others beside myself possessed the same strange faculty of being able to leave their earthly husk behind them for a brief season. But what in me was abnormal and beyond my own control, was in the figure before me normal and exercisable at will. Mr. Van Klugen—for he it was—had only to lie down with his head and feet pointing due north and south, and to will intensely, in order to bring on a state of coma or trance, in which for the time being the spirit could separate itself from the body almost as easily as the body could cast off its outer clothing. All this I learned in after-conversation with Van Klugen. He told me, too, that his experience had brought him into contact with some half-dozen people possessed of the same singular faculty; but in none of them was it so powerfully developed as in himself. With him, in fact, the process had almost become formulated into the simplicity of an exact science.

“‘We have never met before,’ began the shade of Mr. Van Klugen, “but so fine is the chord of sympathy which vibrates between one human soul, and each and every soul when no longer shut up in a fleshly tenement, that as I sat here, pining in solitude, and longing for a companion, I knew to an instant when I was no longer alone in this debatable land that lies between the common world and the world of spirits emancipated by death. I willed strongly that you should come hither, and you are here. But you are troubled, brother shade. You are wanting in that air of serenity which should ever accompany the philosophic mind.”

“ ‘ “ Why I have been brought hither without any wish on my own part is a mystery to me,” I said, “ seeing that I am due in Hades at five minutes past one.”

“ ‘ “ Is it indeed so? And I am to be made a spectacle for gods and men outside the walls of a certain gaol at nine o’clock next Monday morning—and that for a crime of which I am as innocent as you are. After all, our fates are not so very dissimilar.”

“ ‘ “ Would that I could change places with you ! ” I exclaimed. “ It is surely better to die innocent, even by the hangman’s hand, than to be driven to end one’s existence by one’s own act.”

“ ‘ “ That is as it may be. But tell me what has brought you to this bitter strait.”

‘ I told him everything—all my faults, follies, and crimes, and how I had come to the conclusion that there was no way out of my coil of troubles but one.

‘ He listened attentively. “ And would you really prefer to change places with me ? ” he asked when I had done.

“ ‘ “ Really and truly I would. I have a horror of blowing out my brains ; and since die I must, I should prefer to be put out of existence automatically by the hand of another.”

‘ A long conversation followed, which I have neither time nor inclination to detail. The result may be stated in a few words.

‘ In the first place we were to exchange identities. I was to become the tenant of the unoccupied body of Felix Van Klugen, at that time lying in a comatose state in Hemingford Gaol ; he was to become the tenant of my unoccupied body, at that time lying in my chambers at Gray’s Inn. I, as the tenant of Van Klugen’s body, was to suffer the extreme penalty of the law on the day appointed for that ceremony, in return for which, out of his wealth (which he had taken the precaution to settle on his mother previously to his trial), he was to pay the whole of my debts, to refund my mother’s portion and my sister’s dowry, and in addition to settle five hundred a year for life upon each of them.

‘ These preliminaries having been agreed upon, it was decided that we should meet on the following night at the same time and place for the further discussion of our plan.

‘ Even after I had got back to the world of everyday realities I did not repent the bargain I had made. By Van Klugen’s instructions I took next evening a strong dose of opium in combination with certain other powerful Eastern drugs. Ten minutes after swallowing the mixture I faded into unconsciousness, only to wake again in spirit in Van Klugen’s library, where my shadowy host was already awaiting my arrival.

‘ At that last meeting everything was arranged, and it was

decided that the all-important change should take place the following night. Much of the time we spent together was employed in coaching up Van Klugen in the history of my family and myself. He entered into all the details with avidity, and I do not doubt that those who, having known the Herman Trevis of former days, may choose to keep up their acquaintance with the Herman Trevis of to-day, will find in him a change that will seem all but miraculous. In place of a spendthrift and a sot, of a man who cared for little beyond the gratification of his own vicious tastes, they will find a man temperate to the point of abstemiousness, a man rich in philosophic culture, a scholar and a gentleman. How unaccountable to them will seem such a transformation!

‘But another hour has just struck, and I must hurry on.

‘Next night we met again. There were a few final arrangements to make, and then both of us were ready for the great change. We shook hands and parted. You know the rest. A few seconds later I, Herman Trevis, found myself in the guise and outward semblance of Felix van Klugen, a condemned felon in Hemingford Gaol, while the real Felix van Klugen would henceforth be known to the world as Herman Trevis.

‘I accepted the alternative offered me deliberately, and of my own free will. I cannot say that I regret having done so, although I may have found it a matter of some difficulty to reconcile myself to the peculiarities of the position. Even that, however, has been accomplished.

‘I pen this confession under no apprehension that its contents can ever be made use of against the real Mr. Van Klugen. What, indeed, could the law do in such a case? Nothing—absolutely nothing. It has claimed its victim, and it is satisfied.—*Vale.* —Herman Trevis.’

T. W. SPEIGHT.

The Elixir of Death.

It is Friday, the thirteenth day of November; it is just one year to-day since she died, and before night I shall have followed her across the mystic threshold of darkness and of death. It is just one year to-day since she died, alone, on the desolate ocean, in a foreign ship, with no friend near her, with only strange hands to do the last offices of this life, and with tongues yet stranger to answer her last words. She died at six in the evening, and at six in the evening I shall die, as lonely here in the great city as she on the dreary ocean. At six to-night, in two or three short hours more, when the chill wind falls down on the damp streets, amid the hurrying roar which declares that the day is done, I shall leave this life, as unworthy to die as I am to live.

I do not die to punish my sin. I know full well that for me it would be a punishment more deadly to live, with my body worn and racked, with my brain on fire, with my heart dull and heavy, with my conscience sharper than a serpent's tooth, with the awful knowledge I have now of the emptiness of life. There is nothing for me to live for. I have no hopes, no desires even. For me the future is as black as the past. Annihilation,—to be blotted out absolutely from the whole universe, to cease to be suddenly—body, and mind, and soul,—this is the one thing I could wish, and this one thing I know I cannot attain. At most I can die; in life I can control myself; after death, what happens will happen—without effort on my part, and despite my utmost effort should I be foolish enough to resist.

Before I die, then, with the little strength now left to me, and in spite of the gnawing pain which will kill me at last, I write this record of my search for the Elixir of Death. Curiosity may lead some man to read it—the same curiosity which led me to my great crime, and through the crime to the great discovery. I shall not begin at my birth or at my bringing-up; it is of my death and not of my birth that curiosity will care to read. I am not yet two-score years of age; I shall die before I have attained half of the allotted years of man; and my life has been lived along one line—I have been an unceasing, unhasting, unresting inquirer. I have had always the same fatal and unquenchable curiosity which is the index of the highest and most masculine genius, as it is also the mark of the most feminine pettiness.

I was a youth of studious habits, with a persistent desire for

investigation, especially in queer and odd paths little trodden by the average man—that personification of the humdrum and the commonplace, from which I ever revolted. I had this same taste even as a boy—if indeed I ever was a boy. Sometimes when I have watched other children, I have wondered whether I was ever a child myself: it seemed to me as though I had always been what I was. A time came when I hoped to have had my childhood in the society of my own children; but now—— And yet perhaps it is best as it is: there are those who wish for children that they may be trained up to continue a great work, and to carry it on to ultimate victory. But I have made my great discovery and I have nothing to leave a son but a confession of the emptiness of life and the futility of desire. I do not know the meaning of family ties: my father died before I was born, and my mother died in giving me birth. I have always lived alone and lonely except during the few short months of my marriage.

When I left college I spoke French, and German, and Italian; I knew Greek and Latin better than most students of my age; and I had a smattering of Hebrew and Sanskrit. To science I had then given little attention, and I did not know enough to be aware of my own ignorance. My graduating thesis was on ‘The Deadlock of Science;’ I found it two or three years ago, and I was surprised at the sharpness of my reasoning, and at the depth of my incompetence to attempt a subject of which I knew nothing. I devoted myself at once to the study of law with a youthful ardour, which has now burnt out and consumed itself utterly, leaving not so much as the smouldering ashes behind. I studied the old law-books; I learnt Norman French; I deciphered crumbling and mouldy treatises on Roman law, written in quaint mediæval Latin, full of queer elisions and contractions. It was not long before I discovered that medical jurisprudence interested me more than any other branch of law. From Wharton and Stillé I turned to the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and to the *Newgate Calendar*, until I had a strange callousness to the details of physical suffering which had for me a morbid fascination. I read all the famous trials; I became an expert on infanticide, on assault, on murder; I studied the details of death by strangulation, by the sword or dagger, and by poison. I found a special charm in the investigation of dormant charges of poisoning, freely bandied about in Italy and in France when the darkness of the middle ages was clearing away and the principles of toxicology began to be better understood. I gave a re-hearing to many an accused, and acquitted many a victim who had fallen beneath the axe, while I sent to the scaffold many a king and emperor, many

a prince and pope who had died comfortably in his bed three hundred years before I was born. I became learned in poisons; I knew the differences between vegetable and mineral poisons; I knew the antidotes and remedies; I guessed the poison which has no antidote. In the course of this study I soon felt the insufficiency of my preparation for scientific research, and for the investigation of physiological subtleties. I abandoned the law, and gave myself up to the study of medicine. I enrolled myself at a medical school, and began at the beginning to conquer the science of medicine as I had conquered the science of law. In this I found my legal studies and my linguistic training of the greatest use.

Time passed and I was graduated. For my thesis on 'The Future of Toxicology' I took a prize. I did not seek to set up as a physician after I received the diploma which gave me the right to cure or to kill. I did not need the little money I might make in practising, and I had already begun to hoard my time as the most precious of my possessions, if I expected ever to be of use to mankind. The little fortune which had hitherto supported me was enough for my simple wants. With strict economy I was enabled to set aside from my annual income a sum of money to be devoted to my research.

At first this money was spent in books, for I soon exhausted all that the best public and private libraries of New York contained on my specialty. I did not cumber my small rooms with the standard treatises, or with long sets of volumes to be found in every collection, but I took a keen delight in gathering together reports of trials for poisoning, not only in America and in England, but in France, Germany, and especially in Italy. I had copies made for me from the secret archives of France; and thus, for instance, I obtained the interrogatories which confirmed the contemporary suspicions as to the cause of the death of Louvois. Correspondents in Italy sent me the useful fragments of unpublished memoirs as frank as those of Benvenuto Cellini or Casanova de Seingalt, and as useful in the understanding of the past. Many a strange and tortuous transaction settled by the sudden hand of death I was able to read by the light of modern science, and to explain as clearly as Sir David Brewster explained the mystery of the legion of devils which appeared at midnight to Cellini in the Colosseum at Rome three centuries and a half ago.

Besides the books about poisoning, I had the poisons themselves. I arranged in chronological order a collection of the famous poisons of history, and in little vials on a single shelf of a bookcase might be seen the hemlock draught of Socrates, the

potion which Locusta got ready at the bidding of Nero ; the famous poison of the Borgias (far simpler and far more easy to counteract than its reputation warranted) ; the curious substances composing the candle which lighted Pope Clement VII. to his death ; the mixture, also Italian, which Catherine de Medicis gave to Charles IX. ; the subtle perfume, as deadly as the odour of the upas, with which the bouquet of Adrienne Lecouvreur was charged ; the succession powder of the Marquise de Brinvilliers ; the unpretending but efficacious dose given by Madame Lafarge to her husband ; and, worse than all, the Italian *acqua tofana*, colourless and odourless, yet so deadly that a single drop administered once a week caused death at the end of two years, during which time the very slightest ailment was inevitably fatal. I have stood before that little case of poisons hour after hour in rapt contemplation of the awful possibilities of destruction pent up within the scant score of tiny vials.

In time my researches were noised abroad ; I was known as an earnest student ; I was called upon to testify as an expert ; and I was soon recognised as an authority on toxicology. My testimony decided more than one case ; and more than once a man's life hung on the words that fell from my lips. In the great Hungerford trial, it was my original investigation and my startling experiment, repeated in court before the jury, which revealed the prisoner's guilt incontrovertibly, in spite of the feeble protests of a professor of analytical chemistry, the poor ignorant creature whom the defence had relied on to combat me. I suppose I ought not to call him ignorant now, as he has heard me testify so often that even he must have been forced to pick up a little knowledge of the elementary principles of toxicology.

It was at this time, just as my position was assured, that a strange thing happened to me—I fell in love. I was in court bearing witness against a young man named Morgan, who was accused of having poisoned his father. Before I had said twenty words I became conscious of a look of intense appeal in the face of a beautiful girl sitting just below me. I turned my head so as to not see her, but her large mournful eyes rose before me, and the wistful twitch of her mouth I could not but remember. I caught sight of the prisoner's face, and in a second I was assured that the tall, pale creature with the sad and pitiful expression was his sister. A minute more and my plan was made : my testimony, which was wont to be firm and unhesitating, became weak and wavering. The counsel for the defence was a clever man, and he saw the openings I had left for him, and in five

minutes of hurried cross-examination he got from me just the evidence his case needed. By great good fortune, the prosecution had also engaged the absurd old professor of analytical chemistry, and the counsel for the defence had no difficulty in turning the feeble old fellow inside out and in revealing the emptiness within. The jury acquitted Wilfred Morgan without leaving their seats, and within six months Lilian, his sister, was my bride.

We made a wedding trip to Europe, and we did what all newly married couples are wont to do. We wandered through Scotland and England, and we spent a few days in London, where I found little to interest me. Life in humdrum England is tame to a man whose thoughts are set on the more mysterious tragedies of human existence. We paused in Paris while I picked up rare volumes, long lacking on my shelves. We walked in Switzerland and rowed on Lake Geneva by moonlight under the shadow of Mont Blanc. We crossed into Italy, and here I felt my interest in humanity revive. We were happy, as man may be once in his life at least, for a little space. We found our happiness in each other, and each enjoyed the other's pleasure. At times it has seemed to me that the memory of this happiness has embittered the sorrow which followed it swiftly. In a dream sometimes I live those joyful days again, and then I awake to feel myself alone, and to know myself what I am. After all, sleep is but a palliative for the disease of life—death is the only remedy.

When we left Italy we passed up into the Tyrol, and there one day I heard a chance allusion to the arsenic-eaters, and I recalled an early desire to investigate for myself the habit of the workers in the arsenic mines, who feed daily on a fixed portion of the deadly mineral, not merely without injury or danger, but with advantage, in that they are thereby protected from the insidious assault of the fatal product of their labour. I went to the mines alone, for my wife had a horror of poison in all its forms. The word even was painful to her. She believed her brother to be innocent, but whenever she chose to close her eyes she could see him lying in prison, under the awful accusation of parricide.

My examination of the mine was to me most interesting and instructive. Strange as it may seem, I discovered that it was possible to poison by refusing to give poison; in other words, when a man has learnt to eat arsenic in a fixed dose with impunity, that dose is necessary to him, and if it is denied, then apparently the cumulative force of the mineral in his system is released, and he dies with every symptom of arsenical poisoning. The superintendent of the mines told me that at the age of eighteen, to protect himself from the pernicious effects of his daily toil, he took a grain of

arsenic every morning in his coffee, and that he had gradually had to increase the dose until at the time I saw him, at the age of thirty-five, he took fifteen grains every day. Now I knew that fifteen grains is a quantity sufficient to kill five men. Twice had the superintendent been induced by timorous friends to try to stop the dangerous habit; and twice he had failed miserably. On the seventh day of the abstinence from arsenic he had been obliged to return to it again, on the penalty of his life. He was fully resolved, so he told me, that he would not again attempt to break off the habit suddenly, for he knew that the result would inevitably be fatal. He intended, when he should retire from his position, at the age of forty-five, to begin to reduce the daily dose gradually until, at fifty, he might give it up altogether. I took notes of his and of my own corroboratory observations, and I set down in bold black and white the fact which had most struck me. It is possible to cause death by ceasing to administer a poison.

It was in the midst of the happiness of my bridal tour, when I smiled at the world and the responsive world willingly smiled back, and when the future was full of hope and desire, it was then that I caught the first glimpse of my great idea and was conscious of the first vague intimations of my great discovery. Perhaps it was my happiness which led me into the search for what was to bring misery and death to my wife and to myself. It was late in the spring, and we were in Vienna; and I can remember even now the feeling of unwonted cerebral excitement I experienced. It was to me a moment of growth and expansion. I felt that the fertility of my mind was multiplied fourfold, although of course in the beginning I did not know either the cause or the effect of this. I can recall the very instant when the indistinct germ of the idea began to take root in my brain. An Austrian, a learned enthusiast in the history of his noble city, told me the moving tale of the attack of the Turks; and as I heard again how the fate of civilisation depended on the defence of one town against the host of Islam led by a mighty leader, I could not but think how much shorter it would have been to have struck at that leader and to have killed *him*, without whose energetic will the invaders would soon have been beaten back. To disorganise an attacking force by removing its head, suddenly, unexpectedly, at the most inopportune moment—this would be at once the surest and the simplest means of defence. Then it was that I first thought of the Elixir of Death.

And from that instant the idea never left me; it took possession of me; it mastered me until I could master it. For the few weeks longer that we lingered in Europe I was still happy, for a

man does not get out of the habit of happiness all at once. But I had a fixed idea, and I pursued that relentlessly, to the mangling and destruction of whatever might stand between me and the accomplishment of my desire. What I sought was a thing so important to all humanity that the few paltry human existences I might have occasion to sacrifice in the attainment of my goal were as nothing. For success in my search I was ready to give my own life, and I saw no reason why the lives of others should be more precious to me than my own life.

The Elixir of Death was the name I had given in my own mind to the object of my search. And by the Elixir of Death I meant a poison of properties hitherto unknown or hitherto uncombined. I believed that it was possible to discover a poison which could be administered to anybody at any time and from any distance, with the result of causing instant death. Once in possession of the Elixir of Death, and I was master of the world. The Elixir of Death was a universal talisman to which all things were obedient, for death would come at its call, and death rules all things. If I could once compound the Elixir of Death, I had it in my power to change the destiny of mankind and to mould all humanity to my will. If an Attila, a Tamerlane, a Genghis Khan, threatened civilisation, with the Elixir of Death I could remove him at once from the face of the earth. If a Napoleon arose, absorbing to himself by sheer force of will and intellect the human energy which should have been utilised in forwarding human progress, a single drop of the Elixir of Death would be more potent than he. If there should come a false prophet, leading all mankind astray by eloquent sophistries, I had but to use the Elixir of Death, and he ceased to be. If a great criminal should set himself above the law, and thus with impunity give an immoral example, the Elixir of Death would go on its way and do its deadly work, though the mighty malefactor were as inured to poison as Mithridates. When I had once discovered the Elixir of Death I should have—without let or hindrance or control—I should have the power of life and death over the whole world. If a man in the furthest corner of the earth deserved to die, I had but to make use of the Elixir of Death and the man was dead. When my search should be successful I should have more power than any man who ever walked on the face of the earth. Yet I did not seek out this secret as a means of personal aggrandisement; I sought it for the furtherance of the cause of humanity. I had confidence in my own wish to do right. And now, in my last hour, as I look back over the few months since the Elixir of Death came into my possession as the result and the reward of my

labour and my crime, I can say boldly that I have never used it for selfish ends. What I have done with the Elixir of Death, inexplicable as it may have seemed to the blind and foolish crowd, was done always with the highest motives; but there is no need now to enter into futile explanations. What I did is done, and the future must judge.

The search for the Elixir of Death was long and toilsome, and abounded in false starts and sudden endings in blind alleys. Clue after clue I took up with hope and laid down again with a feeling akin to despair. Soon I gained heart once more and attacked the problem on another side. Again and again I was on the brink of success, when a final experiment dropped me instantly to the bottom of the precipice I had been trying to climb. The tortures of Tantalus and the tortures of Sisyphus together were not as hard to bear as those I endured without complaint, for I had hope at bottom. Nay more, I had an unfailing belief that I should succeed at last. I knew that I should find the Elixir of Death before death found me. But this certainty as to the result did not lead me to relax any of my efforts for its attainment. I toiled unceasingly. Some days I worked so hard that when darkness came I could not sleep; then I would pace the silent streets all night, under the cold stars, with my mind at its highest tension; often have I wondered why it did not break down. Again I would work sometimes for a week together day and night, never leaving my laboratory for rest or food, going wholly without rest and almost without food.

In these months of wrestling with the unknown my wife was left to herself. To be mated to a man with one idea is to carry a ball and chain through life. An ardent enthusiast with his gaze fixed on the future is a sorry husband for any woman, but she may at least have the joy of sharing in his hopes and of consoling him in his disappointments. This joy was denied to my wife. From the very nature of the secret I was seeking, it could not be confided to her. I could not go to her and tell her how far I had advanced towards my great discovery. The mere thought of poison pained her; the word never crossed her lips, and she never entered my laboratory or my library. What she might see there was too painful to her in the memories it recalled. And thus it was that our happiness fell away and we began to drift apart. That I neglected her cruelly I know now, though I did not think of it then. Her life lost its sunshine and her heart failed her. She never repined, and if she murmured, I never heard it. She was alone—as I was alone.

One morning a fresh misfortune fell upon her. She was

devoted to her brother, whose life I had saved from the gallows, and against whom I never said a word to her. She believed in him ; and even his moody ways and the unhappiness marked on his face never shook her confidence in his innocence. After his acquittal he had gone back to his old business, and in the reaction of public sentiment in his favour he had been prosperous. Lilian left her small fortune in his hands, and at her suggestion I gave him mine to manage for me. I was never a man of business, but I ought not to have been blind to the fact that Wilfred Morgan was not in a condition to be trusted with the control of large sums of money. Knowing him and knowing what I had done, I ought to have kept watch over him. But I had but one thought—the Elixir of Death—and I paid no attention to Wilfred Morgan. Even the chance allusions that I happened to hear in regard to his speculations and dissipations did not make any impression on me. He always avoided me—I knew why. And I ascribed his haggard and hang-dog look to the same cause. So I was wholly unprepared for what happened. In spite of his frantic struggles to extricate himself, Wilfred Morgan was sucked deeper and deeper into the quicksands of speculation. He lost his own fortune, his sister's, mine, and then he shot himself through the heart.

On the evening of the day that this happened I had made the most important step towards my discovery. I had found the constituent elements of the Elixir of Death. To combine them in exactly the best proportions and to give them the further property of doing their deadly work at any distance—these were the things I had yet to do before the Elixir of Death was an assured success. And these things, I knew, would take many months more of unhesitating hard labour of body and mind. The shot that killed Wilfred Morgan shattered all my plans. To accomplish my great purpose I needed all my time, and an absolute freedom from material cares was indispensable. The loss of my little fortune and of my wife's meant that I should have to support myself by the practice of my profession—either law or medicine, as I might choose.

Fortunately, just at this moment the editors of a great encyclopedia of medicine, a huge undertaking to which all the most eminent specialists were to contribute, asked me to prepare for them the treatise on toxicology and on medical jurisprudence, and to superintend the preparation of the host of minor titles in both these subjects. For these labours, which took but two or three hours a day, the payment was liberal and prompt. I was enabled to continue my researches ; but I found that I now made little progress. I needed more time and I needed more money. I was

forced to feel keenly the loss of my fortune ; and yet I am glad to say that I never took thought how I could make another. And I had power to get money in ways unknown to other men.

I had often smiled as I read the story of the seekers after the Philosopher's Stone, which might transmute the baser metals into gold and silver. What was gold and what was silver to a true philosopher given over, body and soul, to the solution of a problem which seemed inscrutable even to those who were capable of conceiving its conditions ? As vain as the efforts of the seekers after the Philosopher's Stone were the wanderings of those who thought to find the Fountain of Youth. But their motives were more laudable. That a man should desire to be young even after he had acquired the wisdom of years—that he should wish to have an unclouded eye and a quick hand, to execute what his more mature mind had conceived,—this I could understand and tolerate. But like wealth, youth is a means only, and the alchemists made it an end. To live for ever—which was the aim of those who sought the Elixir of Life—what a paltry endeavour was this ! Of what account is life, in comparison with knowledge and power ? And when men have attained to perpetual life, they have always found it a curse and never a blessing. Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, and Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman—they had forced upon them what the seekers after the Elixir of Life were in search of, and they hated it, and they held themselves accursed that they had it. What Ahasuerus and Vanderdecken would have given their souls to possess was the Elixir of Death.

That I should be debarred from this precious discovery by barren considerations of money or time, was intolerable. Perhaps, if I had had a friend to whom I could pour forth my projects, and to whom I could explain my disappointments, and who could strengthen me with inspiring consolation and encouragement, I might have thrown off the feeling of impatient and feverish irritation and recklessness which came upon me. But I had no friend in the world. To my wife I could say nothing ; shrouded in her grief, she glided silently about our four rooms, until I came to shrink from looking at her lest I should reproach her as the cause of my loss. If only she had not fixed her gaze upon me when I was about to testify in court, her brother would not have lived to bring ruin on us both. But consequences are pitiless.

While I was in this unhealthy and morbid state of mind, and while we were living thus insufferably, I happened to take down from an upper shelf the note-books I had used during my wedding trip to Europe. Loosely in the leaves of one of them I found two folded papers ; they were the insurance policies on my life and on

my wife's, each for fifty thousand dollars, and each for the other's benefit, which we had taken out, at the suggestion of Wilfred Morgan a few days after we were married. He had made the payments on them as they came due. With the papers in my hand I made a hasty calculation and I found that it was almost time to make another payment lest the policy should lapse by default. Moved by an inexplicable impulse, I picked out a hundred rare volumes from my overcrowded shelves, and took them to a bookseller who had recently told me that a customer of his was collecting a toxicological library ; and the money he gave me for these sufficed to keep alive the policy on my wife's life. If she should die I would receive the insurance on her life ; with fifty thousand dollars I could complete the Elixir of Death beyond all question or dispute. And I knew that my wife was tired of life and that she longed for the rest of the grave. And the sight of her pale face wore on me more and more, day by day.

Perhaps I was mad ; I do not know. A great physician has said that all men are mad. It may be that he was right, and that I was only a little more mad than my fellow-man. It may be that I am mad now. I know little about madness, yet I know more than most, for I know I know nothing. I despise the poor creatures who spend themselves prying into the nooks and recesses of the brain, when there is so much work in the world at large waiting to be done.

The note-book in which I had found the policies lay on my desk for a few days. When I took it up, I saw that it was the one in which I had recorded my notes in the Tyrol. I read them again in silence, and a sort of a stupor fell upon me. I sat still and stolid for an hour or more, then I arose and locked the note-book in the secret drawer of my desk, and I went out for a walk. It was nearly midnight in the middle of winter, and a chill rain froze as fast as it fell. When I returned home just before dawn, I was clothed in a cement of ice, but I had not felt the cold. I went at once into the little room which served me as a laboratory.

The next day my wife complained of burning pains. I gave her medicine to relieve her, and although it did no immediate good, the pains gradually wore away, and had wholly gone at the end of the week. A few weeks later they returned, only to disappear again a few days later. I had increased the daily dose of arsenic that I gave my wife every morning in her coffee.

After that I increased it every three weeks, and once every three weeks my wife had these burning pains. I always prescribed for her in vain effort to relieve the inevitable pain. I gave time to this, which I had to take from my labours on the Elixir of

Death—time that I could ill spare if I was ever to accomplish anything. I was glad to know that in spite of these pains Lilian was in excellent health, and I came in time to have a strong scientific interest in her case. I noted every symptom and I watched every change. I think she mistook the meaning of my attention, and for a little while at least she was happy in the thought that I loved her again. Her love gave her strength to bear the pangs which came upon her so mysteriously.

In this manner nearly a year had sped with its burden of anxiety, and I determined to test the success of my experiment—not to end it finally, however, as the time for that had not yet come. One day I did not administer the usual dose of arsenic, nor did I the next nor the next. In less than a week Lilian began to fall away ; she was too feeble to walk ; she could not eat ; she was burnt up by the gnawing and growing pain within ; in a word, she had every symptom of arsenical poisoning. There could be no doubt as to the success of the experiment. If I did not at once give her the portion of arsenic to which she had become accustomed she would die. On the eighth day after the cessation I gave her the poison again, in her coffee, at breakfast. It was but a trifling dose, but its effect was instantaneous. She revived and began to improve. In ten days I had returned to the full dose ; I had even increased it slightly ; and Lilian had recovered her strength. Yet she was taking every day four grains of arsenic, a quantity sufficient to kill two able-bodied men.

I now began to prepare for the end, and I longed for the end to come that I might get on with my work. For several months so severe was the tension on my nerves that I had been unable to go on with the search for the Elixir of Death. Beyond a few barren experiments, mechanically conducted to an unsatisfactory conclusion, I had done nothing, and I was possessed by a passionate longing to get to work again as soon as might be. Every day's delay maddened me. Anxious as I was, and eager as I was, to gain possession of the money which I needed in my great work, I was not wanting in caution. I had no wish to see the man who was on the brink of the discovery of the Elixir of Death hauled to prison for a vulgar murder. I took counsel of my cunning. Hitherto I had ministered to all my wife's ailments, and she never dreamed of consulting another physician. I knew a conceited, good-natured, foolish young fellow who had just been graduated from the medical school, where he had been a favourite pupil of the poor doddering old professor of analytical chemistry. From him I had nothing to fear, and him therefore I called in—a compliment which gratified him immeasurably. He came to see my

wife several times and saw nothing. I gave Lilian a little medicine, and I threw in her way one or two books on climate. I began to drop hints that perhaps she had a tendency to consumption, likely to be developed rapidly by one of the harsh winters of New York. Her mother, who had married again, was living at Nice, and I suggested that there was no better climate for consumptives than Nice. As luck would have it, the next letter from Lilian's mother came from Mentone, and it expressed a wish that Lilian would come over and spend the winter with them at Nice. Then I arranged to meet the young doctor, accidentally, and I inoculated him with the idea that my wife was consumptive, and needed a season in the south of France, where she could have complete change and rest. I knew Lilian could hardly bear to part from me, so I called in the young doctor, and the suggestion came from him. My wife indignantly rejected it, but I combated it so feebly that the young doctor persevered. For a week or ten days after his visit nothing more was said about her joining her mother; then the discussion was suddenly revived. The young doctor was called in again; his forcible arguments converted me reluctantly, and I told her she ought to go if she wished to save her life.

She yielded at last, when I promised to rejoin her in the spring. I engaged her state-room on the 'Deutschland,' to sail Saturday, November 6, and on Sunday, the first day of November, I gave her the last dose of arsenic. In two or three days the effects of the cessation from the poison began to be apparent, but it was then too late to draw back. When Saturday came, and I took her on board the boat and led her to her state-room, and was about to say good-bye, she aroused herself from the dull lethargy into which she had sunk a few hours before. She clung to me and asked if I could not give up my work and go with her. And as she asked that she knew it was impossible. Then she begged me not to ask her to leave me. If she had consumption, she was not afraid of death, she said, and she was ready to die here by my side in New York. I told her that it was too late then to draw back. She cast her large mournful eyes on me with a most pitiful look and said, 'If I am to die, I would rather die here.' Then she roused herself, and stood up and said that if she must die she would rather die by my hand!

I comforted her as best as I could, and just as the bell rang for the departure of the boat I administered a soporific, which soon soothed her into slumber. Then I left the vessel, and stood on the dock, and saw it glide away from my sight, as Lilian had glided out of my heart, fading away gradually until I could no

longer distinguish it in the dim distance. I knew that the end was at hand. I knew that Lilian would die eleven or twelve days after I had ceased to give the arsenic ; and I knew that her death would be ascribed to sea-sickness, while her body would be consigned to the waves. And so it came to pass. In a month all was over ; the news came of the safe arrival out of the *Deutschland*, one passenger, the wife of an eminent American scientist, having died on the voyage from the effects of sea-sickness. In a few weeks the proof of her death had been given to the Life Insurance Company, and I had received the fifty thousand dollars I needed for my search after the Elixir of Death.

It is impossible to describe the buoyant joy I felt the first time I entered my laboratory after I had received the money, and I knew that I could thereafter devote my time wholly to the cause of science without any vulgar thought of money-making. I had the fierce delight the Arctic explorer might feel could he stand in sight of the open polar sea. For I too was in sight of my goal, although the locked ice of poverty had kept me from going forward. I had combined the ingredients of the Elixir of Death, and all that remained to do was to devise the method of administration, at any time, at any distance, and in spite of any precautions against it. When compared with what I had accomplished, what remained to be achieved was the veriest trifle. I came to my work fresh and with a new burst of enthusiasm, and after a month of hard labour I discovered the principle, and within another month I had perfected the application of it. Like all really great discoveries, it had the merit of extraordinary simplicity. Taking a hint from the Indian who sends hurtling through the air, straight to the heart of the victim, the poisoned arrow, the point of which he has steeped in the venom of the serpent's sting, I bent my utmost endeavours to the utilisation of natural forces, and in time I taught them to do my bidding. Within three months after I had seen my wife sail away from my sight to meet a watery grave, I stood alone in my laboratory at midnight with a tiny vial in my hand containing the Elixir of Death. I had discovered the poison which could cause the death of any one, at any time, at any distance, despite any and all precautions. The Elixir of Death was mine at last, and the whole world was in my power!

With the accomplishment of my desire I lost my object in life. I had attained to the utmost of my wish. There was nothing further for me to do. To use the power I possessed was not part of my plan. It was the possession of the power which I had sought, and not its use. The wanton exercise of might was always re-

pugnant to me and I was tender-hearted enough never to kill an insect except to effect a purpose. While I was seeking the Elixir of Death it seemed to me that the occasions for its righteous use would be numberless, but when I had found the Elixir of Death I considered the few apparent occasions which reluctantly presented themselves, and they were inadequate. No Genghis Khan or Tamerlane threatened civilisation; no Napoleon was master of mankind; no False Prophet had arisen to lead humanity astray. Soon I saw that it might be a century before there would be need for the Elixir of Death—and in a century where should I be? I could not hope, and I knew I did not wish to live as long as that.

If I were not alive when the occasion arose for the use of the Elixir of Death, who would there be to administer it? That was the question to which I gave prolonged thought. I knew no man to whom I could trust my secret. I knew no man in whose hands I would willingly place the awful power and the mighty temptation of the Elixir of Death. I knew no man strong enough to withstand that temptation and wise enough to wield the power solely for the benefit of all mankind. I knew no man who would have self-restraint enough not to make use of the Elixir of Death for the furtherance of his own self-interest. The longer I considered this question, the less I felt disposed to let the great secret pass from my own keeping. In time I began to doubt even my own worthiness to have and to hold the Elixir of Death. I saw that even in my own hands, the proper exercise of the mighty power I possessed depended wholly on my own fallible judgment; and I feared that a day might come when my will should be weaker and when I myself might yield to the temptation and use the Elixir of Death for some paltry purpose of my own.

Then I awakened to the solemn fact, that if there was no one to whom I could entrust the Elixir of Death after I had ceased to live, and if there was even a doubt whether I myself were altogether to be trusted to use it only at the right moment, then alas, the discovery had been futile, and all hope of its benefiting the world was vain. Slowly I awakened to the absolute uselessness of the Elixir of Death. That it was a mighty engine of good to mankind I knew, but there was no man fit to be trusted with its keeping.

When this chilling truth was borne in upon me, I had a moment of profound discouragement. And at this moment my thoughts went back to the wife, whose life I had taken in the search for what was worthless now I had it. I saw the mournful and appealing glance of her large eyes as we stood side by side in the cabin of the steamship just before she went away to her lonely

death in desolate mid-ocean. Life had no longer anything to offer me but the bitterness of ashes ; everything sank from under me at once. One night, as I sat in the laboratory, with my eyes fixed on the little vial which held the product of my thankless toil, I saw Lilian enter the room, smiling sadly. She stood before me for a minute, and then withdrew as mysteriously as she had come, beckoning to me as she disappeared.

Then I made a solemn vow, which I have performed to the best of my ability. Lilian had died by my hand from the sudden stoppage of the habit of arsenic-eating. I must die the same death. This was my resolve. I began arsenic-eating at once, and as I was stronger than she had been, and as I had nothing now to fear, I increased the doses more frequently than I had dared to do with her. I felt the burning pangs for four days every fortnight, as I increased the daily dose. In less than half the time, I have reached the same amount she took before I sent her away to die. She died alone on the thirteenth of November, and on the thirteenth of November, to-day, I shall die the same death and in the same loneliness. She was buried at sea, but it may be days before I am missed, and they break in here to find my body. Twelve days ago I took my daily allowance of four grains of arsenic, and since then I have not touched it : I ought to die to-night. My strength is greater than hers, and my constitution is stronger, and I fight harder against the suddenly released power of the accumulated poison. It may be that it will not kill me to-day, but I shall die to-night, for all that. If the arsenic does not do its work in season, I have here the little vial of the Elixir of Death, and it shall be of service to mankind, for once at least.¹

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

¹ Fuller details of the arsenic-eaters may be found in most books about the Tyrol. The writer desires to acknowledge also the use here of a few fragments from a slighter sketch written twelve years ago and published under a pseudonym.—B. M.

The Great Keinplatz Experiment.

OF all the sciences which have puzzled the sons of man none had such an attraction for the learned Professor von Baumgarten as those which relate to psychology and the ill-defined relations between mind and matter. A celebrated anatomist, a profound chemist, and one of the first physiologists in Europe, it was a relief for him to turn from these subjects and to bring his varied knowledge to bear upon the study of the soul and the mysterious relationship of spirits. At first when as a young man he began to dip into the secrets of mesmerism, his mind seemed to be wandering in a strange land where all was chaos and darkness, save that here and there some great unexplainable and disconnected fact loomed out in front of him. As the years passed, however, and as the worthy Professor's stock of knowledge increased, for knowledge begets knowledge as money bears interest, much which had seemed strange and unaccountable began to take another shape in his eyes. New trains of reasoning became familiar to him, and he perceived connecting links where all had been incomprehensible and startling. By experiments which extended over twenty years, he obtained a basis of facts upon which it was his ambition to build up a new exact science which should embrace mesmerism, spiritualism, and all cognate subjects. In this he was much helped by his intimate knowledge of the more intricate parts of animal physiology which treat of nerve currents and the working of the brain; for Alexis von Baumgarten was Regius Professor of Physiology at the University of Keinplatz, and had all the resources of the laboratory to aid him in his profound researches.

Professor von Baumgarten was tall and thin, with a hatchet face and steel-grey eyes, which were singularly bright and penetrating. Much thought had furrowed his forehead and contracted his heavy eyebrows, so that he appeared to wear a perpetual frown, which often misled people as to his character, for though austere he was tender-hearted. He was popular among the students, who would gather round him after his lectures and listen eagerly to his strange theories. Often he would call for volunteers from amongst them in order to conduct some experiment, so that eventually there was hardly a lad in the class who had not, at one time or another, been thrown into a mesmeric trance by his professor.

Of all these young devotees of science there was none who equalled in enthusiasm Fritz von Hartmann. It had often seemed strange

to his fellow-students that wild, reckless Fritz, as dashing a young fellow as ever hailed from the Rhineland, should devote the time and trouble which he did, in reading up abstruse works and in assisting the Professor in his strange experiments. The fact was, however, that Fritz was a knowing and long-headed fellow. Months before he had lost his heart to young Elise, the blue-eyed, yellow-haired daughter of the lecturer. Although he had succeeded in learning from her lips that she was not indifferent to his suit, he had never dared to announce himself to her family as a formal suitor. Hence he would have found it a difficult matter to see his young lady had he not adopted the expedient of making himself useful to the Professor. By this means he frequently was asked to the old man's house, where he willingly submitted to be experimented upon in any way, as long as there was a chance of his receiving one bright glance from the eyes of Elise, or one touch of her little hand.

Young Fritz von Hartmann was a handsome lad enough. There were broad acres, too, which would descend to him when his father died. To many he would have seemed an eligible suitor; but Madame frowned upon his presence in the house, and lectured the Professor at times on his allowing such a wolf to prowl around their lamb. To tell the truth, Fritz had an evil name in Keinplatz. Never was there a riot or a duel, or any other mischief afoot, but the young Rhinelander figured as a ringleader in it. No one used more free and violent language, no one drank more, no one played cards more habitually, no one was more idle, save in the one solitary subject. No wonder, then, that the good Frau Professorin gathered her Fräulein under her wing, and resented the attentions of such a *mauvais sujet*. As to the worthy lecturer, he was too much engrossed by his strange studies to form an opinion upon the subject, one way or the other.

For many years there was one question which had continually obtruded itself upon his thoughts. All his experiments and his theories turned upon a single point. A hundred times a day the Professor asked himself whether it was possible for the human spirit to exist apart from the body for a time and then to return to it once again. When the possibility first suggested itself to him his scientific mind had revolted from it. It clashed too violently with preconceived ideas and the prejudices of his early training. Gradually, however, as he proceeded farther and farther along the pathway of original research, his mind shook off its old fetters and became ready to face any conclusion which could reconcile the facts. There were many things which made him believe that it was possible for mind to exist apart from matter. At last it

occurred to him that by a daring and original experiment the question might be definitely decided.

'It is evident,' he remarked in his celebrated article upon invisible entities, which appeared in the 'Keinplatz wochenliche Medicalschrift' about this time, and which surprised the whole scientific world—'it is evident that under certain conditions the soul or mind does separate itself from the body. In the case of a mesmerised person, the body lies in a cataleptic condition, but the spirit has left it. Perhaps you reply that the soul is there, but in a dormant condition. I answer that this is not so, otherwise how can one account for the condition of clairvoyance, which has fallen into disrepute through the knavery of certain scoundrels, but which can easily be shown to be an undoubted fact. I have been able myself, with a sensitive subject, to obtain an accurate description of what was going on in another room or another house. How can such knowledge be accounted for on any hypothesis save that the soul of the subject has left the body and is wandering through space? For a moment it is recalled by the voice of the operator and says what it has seen, and then wings its way once more through the air. Since the spirit is by its very nature invisible, we cannot see these comings and goings, but we see their effect in the body of the subject, now rigid and inert, now struggling to narrate impressions which could never have come to it by natural means. There is only one way which I can see by which the fact can be demonstrated. Although we in the flesh are unable to see these spirits, yet our own spirits, could we separate them from the body, would be conscious of the presence of others. It is my intention therefore shortly to mesmerise one of my pupils. I shall then mesmerise myself in a manner which has become easy to me. After that, if my theory holds good, my spirit will have no difficulty in meeting and communing with the spirit of my pupil, both being separated from the body. I hope to be able to communicate the result of this interesting experiment in an early number of the Keinplatz wochenliche Medicalschrift.'

When the good Professor finally fulfilled his promise, and published an account of what occurred, the narrative was so extraordinary that it was received with general incredulity. The tone of some of the papers was so offensive in their comments upon the matter that the angry *savant* declared that he would never open his mouth again or refer to the subject in any way—a promise which he has faithfully kept. This narrative has been compiled, however, from the most authentic sources, and the events cited in it may be relied upon as substantially correct.

It happened, then, that shortly after the time when Professor

von Baumgarten conceived the idea of the above-mentioned experiment, he was walking thoughtfully homewards after a long day in the laboratory when he met a crowd of roystering students who had just streamed out from a beer-house. At the head of them, half-intoxicated and very noisy, was young Fritz von Hartmann. The Professor would have passed them, but his pupil ran across and intercepted him.

'Heh! my worthy master,' he said, taking the old man by the sleeve, and leading him down the road with him. 'There is something that I have to say to you, and it is easier for me to say it now, when the good beer is humming in my head, than at another time.'

'What is it, then, Fritz?' the physiologist asked, looking at him in mild surprise.

'I hear, mein herr, that you are about to do some wondrous experiment in which you hope to take a man's soul out of his body, and then to put it back again. Is it not so?'

'It is true, Fritz.'

'And have you considered, my dear sir, that you may have some difficulty in finding some one on whom to try this? Pottausend! Suppose that the soul went out and would not come back. That would be a bad business. Who is to take the risk?'

'But, Fritz,' the Professor cried, very much startled by this view of the matter, 'I had relied upon your assistance in the matter. Surely you will not desert me. Consider the honour and glory.'

'Consider the fiddlesticks!' the student cried angrily. 'Am I to be paid always thus? Did I not stand two hours upon a glass insulator while you poured electricity into my body? Have you not stimulated my phrenic nerves, besides ruining my digestion with a galvanic current round my stomach? Four-and-thirty times you have mesmerised me, and what have I got from all this? Nothing. And now you wish to take my soul out, as you would take the works from a watch. It is more than flesh and blood can stand.'

'Dear, dear!' the Professor cried in great distress. 'That is very true, Fritz. I never thought of it before. If you can but suggest how I can compensate you, you will find me ready and willing.'

'Then listen,' said Fritz solemnly. 'If you will pledge your word that after this experiment I may have the hand of your daughter, then I am willing to assist you, but if not, I shall have nothing to do with it. Those are my only terms.'

'And what would my daughter say to this?' the Professor exclaimed after a pause of astonishment.

'Elise would welcome it,' the young man replied. 'We have loved each other long.'

'Then she shall be yours,' the physiologist said with decision, 'for you are a good-hearted young man, and one of the best neurotic subjects that I have ever known—that is when you are not under the influence of alcohol. My experiment is to be performed upon the 4th of next month. You will attend at the physiological laboratory at twelve o'clock. It will be a great occasion, Fritz. Von Gruben is coming from Jena, and Hinterstein from Basle. The chief men of science of all South Germany will be there.'

'I shall be punctual,' the student said briefly; and so the two parted. The Professor plodded homeward, thinking of the great coming event, while the young man staggered along after his noisy companions, with his mind full of the blue-eyed Elise, and of the bargain which he had concluded with her father.

The Professor did not exaggerate when he spoke of the widespread interest excited by his novel psycho-physiological experiment. Long before the hour had arrived the room was filled by a galaxy of talent. Besides the celebrities whom he had mentioned, there had come from London the great Professor Lurcher, who had just established his reputation by a remarkable treatise upon cerebral centres. Several great lights of the Spiritualistic body had also come a long distance to be present, as had a Swedenborgian minister, who considered that the proceedings might throw some light upon the doctrines of the Rosy Cross.

There was considerable applause from this eminent assembly, upon the appearance of Professor von Baumgarten and his subject upon the platform. The lecturer, in a few well-chosen words, explained what his views were, and how he proposed to test them. 'I hold,' he said, 'that when a person is under the influence of mesmerism, his spirit is for the time released from his body, and I challenge anyone to put forward any other hypothesis which will account for the fact of clairvoyance. I therefore hope that upon mesmerising my young friend here, and then putting myself into a trance, our spirits may be able to commune together, though our bodies lie still and inert. After a time nature will resume her sway, our spirits will return into our respective bodies, and all will be as before. With your kind permission, we shall now proceed to attempt the experiment.'

The applause was renewed at this speech, and the audience settled down in expectant silence. With a few rapid passes the Professor mesmerised the young man, who sank back in his chair,

pale and rigid. He then took a bright globe of glass from his pocket, and, by concentrating his gaze upon it and making a strong mental effort, he succeeded in throwing himself into the same condition. It was a strange and impressive sight to see the old man and the young sitting together in the same cataleptic condition. Whither, then, had their souls fled? That was the question which presented itself to each and everyone of the spectators.

Five minutes passed, and then ten, and then fifteen, and then fifteen more, while the Professor and his pupil sat stiff and stark upon the platform. During that time not a sound was heard from the assembled *savants*, but every eye was bent upon the two pale faces, in search of the first signs of returning consciousness. Nearly an hour had elapsed before the patient watchers were rewarded. A faint flush came back to the cheeks of Professor von Baumgarten. The soul was coming back once more to its earthly tenement. Suddenly he stretched out his long thin arms, as one awaking from sleep, and rubbing his eyes, stood up from his chair and gazed about him as though he hardly realised where he was. ‘Tausend Teufel!’ he exclaimed, rapping out a tremendous South German oath, to the great astonishment of his audience and to the disgust of the Swedenborgian. ‘Where the Henker am I then, and what in thunder has occurred?—Oh yes, I remember now. One of these nonsensical mesmeric experiments. There is no result this time, for I remember nothing at all since I became unconscious; so you have had all your long journeys for nothing, my learned friends, and a very good joke too; at which the Regius Professor of Physiology burst into a roar of laughter and slapped his thigh in a highly indecorous fashion. The audience were so enraged at this unseemly behaviour on the part of their host, that there might have been a considerable disturbance had it not been for the judicious interference of young Fritz von Hartmann, who had now recovered from his lethargy. Stepping to the front of the platform, the young man apologised for the conduct of his companion. ‘I am sorry to say,’ he said, ‘that he is a harum-scarum sort of fellow, although he appeared so grave at the commencement of this experiment. He is still suffering from mesmeric reaction and is hardly accountable for his words. As to the experiment itself, I do not consider it to be a failure. It is very possible that our spirits may have been communing in space during this hour; but, unfortunately, our gross bodily memory is distinct from our spirit, and we cannot recall what has occurred. My energies shall now be devoted to devising some means by which spirits may be able to recollect what occurs to them in their free state, and I trust that when I have worked this out, I may have the pleasure of meeting

you all once again in this hall, and demonstrating to you the result.' This address, coming from so young a student, caused considerable astonishment among the audience, and some were inclined to be offended, thinking that he assumed rather too much importance. The majority, however, looked upon him as a young man of great promise, and many comparisons were made as they left the hall between his dignified conduct and the levity of his professor, who during the above remarks was laughing heartily in a corner, by no means abashed at the failure of the experiment.

Now although all these learned men were filing out of the lecture-room under the impression that they had seen nothing of note, as a matter of fact one of the most wonderful things in the whole history of the world had just occurred before their very eyes. Professor von Baumgarten had been so far correct in his theory that both his spirit and that of his pupil had been for a time absent from his body. But here a strange and unforeseen complication had occurred. In their return the spirit of Fritz von Hartmann had entered into the body of Alexis von Baumgarten, and that of Alexis Von Baumgarten had taken up its abode in the frame of Fritz von Hartmann. Hence the slang and scurrility which issued from the lips of the serious Professor, and hence also the weighty words and grave statements which fell from the careless student. It was an unprecedented event, yet no one knew of it, least of all those whom it concerned.

The body of the Professor, feeling conscious suddenly of a great dryness about the back of the throat, sallied out into the street, still chuckling to himself over the result of the experiment, for the soul of Fritz within was reckless at the thought of the bride whom he had won so easily. His first impulse was to go up to the house and see her, but on second thoughts he came to the conclusion that it would be best to stay away until Madame Baumgarten should be informed by her husband of the agreement which had been made. He therefore made his way down to the Grüner Mann, which was one of the favourite trysting places of the wilder students, and ran, boisterously waving his cane in the air, into the little parlour, where sat Spiegler and Müller and half a dozen other boon companions.

'Ha, ha! my boys,' he shouted. 'I knew I should find you here. Drink up, every one of you, and call for what you like, for I'm going to stand treat to-day.'

Had the green man who is depicted upon the signpost of that well-known inn suddenly marched into the room and called for a bottle of wine, the students could not have been more amazed than they were by this unexpected entry of their revered professor. They were so astonished that for a minute or two they

glared at him in utter bewilderment without being able to make any reply to his hearty invitation.

'Donner und Blitzen!' shouted the Professor angrily. 'What the deuce is the matter with you, then? You sit there like a set of stuck pigs staring at me. What is it, then?'

'It is the unexpected honour,' stammered Spiegel who was in the chair.

'Honour—rubbish!' said the Professor testily. 'Do you think that just because I happen to have been exhibiting mesmerism to a parcel of old fossils, I am therefore too proud to associate with dear old friends like you? Come, out of that chair, Spiegel my boy, for I shall preside now. Beer, or wine, or schnapps, my lads—call for what you like and put it all down to me.'

Never was there such an afternoon in the Grüner Mann. The foaming flagons of lager and the green-necked bottles of Rhenish circulated merrily. By degrees the students lost their shyness in the presence of their professor. As for him, he shouted, he sang, he roared, he balanced a long tobacco-pipe upon his nose, and offered to run a hundred yards against any member of the company. The kellner and the barmaid whispered to each other outside the door their astonishment at such proceedings on the part of a regius professor of the ancient university of Kleinplatz. They had still more to whisper about afterwards, for the learned man cracked the Kellner's crown and kissed the barmaid behind the kitchen door.

'Gentlemen,' said the Professor standing up, albeit somewhat totteringly, at the end of the table, and balancing his high old-fashioned wineglass in his bony hand, 'I must now explain to you what is the cause of this festivity.'

'Hear! hear!' roared the students, hammering their beer-glasses against the table—'a speech, a speech!—silence for a speech!'

'The fact is, my friends,' said the Professor, beaming through his spectacles, 'I hope very soon to be married.'

'Married!' cried a student, bolder than the others. 'Is Madame dead, then?'

'Madame who?'

'Why, Madame von Baumgarten, of course.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed the Professor; 'I can see, then, that you know all about my former difficulties. No, she is not dead, but I have reason to believe that she will not oppose my marriage.'

'That is very accommodating of her,' remarked one of the company.

'In fact,' said the Professor, 'I hope that she will now be in

duced to aid me in getting a wife. She and I never took to each other very much ; but now I hope all that may be ended, and when I marry she will come and stay with me.'

'What a happy family !' exclaimed some wag.

'Yes, indeed, and I hope you will come to my wedding, all of you. I won't mention names, but here is to my little bride !' and the Professor waved his glass in the air.

'Here's to his little bride !' roared the roysterers with shouts of laughter. 'Here's her health. Sie soll leben—Hoch !'—and so the fun waxed still more fast and furious, while each young fellow followed the Professor's example, and drank a toast to the girl of his heart.

While all this festivity had been going on at the Grüner Mann, a very different scene had been enacted elsewhere. Young Fritz von Hartmann, with a solemn face and a reserved manner, had, after the experiment, consulted and adjusted some mathematical instruments ; after which, with a few peremptory words to the janitors, he had walked out into the street and wended his way slowly in the direction of the house of the Professor. As he walked he saw Von Althaus, the professor of anatomy, in front of him, and quickening his pace he overtook him.

'I say, Von Althaus,' he exclaimed, tapping him on the sleeve, 'you were asking me for some information the other day concerning the middle coat of the cerebral arteries. Now I find——'

'Donnerwetter !' shouted Von Althaus who was a peppery old fellow. 'What the deuce do you mean by your impertinence ! I'll have you up before the Academical Senate for this, sir ;' with which threat he turned on his heel, and hurried away. Von Hartmann was much surprised at this reception. 'It's on account of this failure of my experiment,' he said to himself, and continued moodily on his way.

Fresh surprises were in store for him, however. He was hurrying along when he was overtaken by two students. These youths, instead of raising their caps or showing any other sign of respect, gave a wild whoop of delight the instant that they saw him, and rushing at him, seized him by each arm and commenced dragging him along with them.

'Gott in himmel !' roared Von Hartmann. 'What is the meaning of this unparalleled insult ? Where are you taking me ?'

'To crack a bottle of wine with us,' said the two students. 'Come along ! That is an invitation which you have never refused.'

'I never heard of such insolence in my life !' cried Von Hartmann. 'Let go my arms ! I shall certainly have you rusticated for this. Let me go, I say !' and he kicked furiously at his captors,

'Oh, if you choose to turn ill-tempered, you may go where you like,' the students said, releasing him. 'We can do very well without you.'

'I know you. I'll pay you out,' said Von Hartmann furiously, and continued in the direction which he imagined to be his own home, much incensed at the two episodes which had occurred to him on the way.

Now Madame von Baumgarten, who was looking out of the window and wondering why her husband was late for dinner, was considerably astonished to see the young student come stalking down the road. As already remarked, she had a great antipathy to him, and if ever he ventured into the house it was on sufferance, and under the protection of the Professor. Still more astonished was she therefore when she beheld him undo the wicket gate and stride up the garden path with the air of one who is master of the situation. She could hardly believe her eyes, and hastened to the door with all her maternal instincts up in arms. From the upper windows the fair Elise had also observed this daring move upon the part of her lover, and her heart beat quick with mingled pride and consternation.

'Good-day, sir,' Madame Baumgarten remarked to the intruder as she stood in gloomy majesty in the open doorway.

'A very fine day indeed, Martha,' returned the other. 'Now, don't stand there like a statue of Juno, but bustle about and get the dinner ready, for I am well-nigh starved.'

'Martha! Dinner!' ejaculated the lady, falling back in astonishment.

'Yes, dinner, Martha, dinner!' howled Von Hartmann, who was becoming irritable. 'Is there anything wonderful in that request when a man has been out all day? I'll wait in the dining-room. Anything will do. Schinken, and sausage, and prunes—any little thing that happens to be about. There you are, standing staring again. Woman, will you or will you not stir your legs?'

This last address, delivered with a perfect shriek of rage, had the effect of sending good Madame Baumgarten flying along the passage and through the kitchen, where she locked herself up in the scullery and went into violent hysterics. In the mean time Von Hartmann strode into the room and threw himself down upon the sofa in the worst of tempers.

'Elise!' he shouted. 'Confound the girl! Elise!'

Thus roughly summoned, the young lady came timidly downstairs and into the presence of her lover. 'Dearest!' she cried, throwing her arms round him. 'I know this is all done for my sake! It is a *ruse* in order to see me.'

Von Hartmann's indignation at this fresh attack upon him was so great that he became speechless for a minute from rage, and could only glare and shake his fists, while he struggled in her embrace. When he at last regained his utterance, he indulged in such a bellow of passion that the young lady dropped back, petrified with fear, into an armchair.

'Never have I passed such a day in my life,' Von Hartmann cried, stamping upon the floor. 'My experiment has failed. Von Althaus has insulted me. Two students have dragged me along the public road. My wife nearly faints when I ask her for dinner, and my daughter flies at me and hugs me like a grizzly bear.'

'You are ill, dear,' the young lady cried. 'Your mind is wandering. You have not even kissed me once.'

'No, and I don't intend to either,' Von Hartmann said with decision. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why don't you go and fetch my slippers, and help your mother to dish the dinner?'

'And is it for this,' Elise cried, burying her face in her handkerchief—'is it for this that I have loved you passionately for upwards of ten months? Is it for this that I have braved my mother's wrath? Oh, you have broken my heart, I am sure you have!' and she sobbed hysterically.

'I can't stand much more of this,' roared Von Hartmann furiously. 'What the deuce does the girl mean! What did I do ten months ago which inspired you with such a particular affection for me? If you are really so very fond, you would do better to run away down and find the schinken and some bread, instead of talking all this nonsense.'

'Oh, my darling!' cried the unhappy maiden, throwing herself into the arms of what she imagined to be her lover, 'you do but joke in order to frighten your little Elise.'

Now it chanced that at the moment of this unexpected embrace, Von Hartmann was still leaning back against the end of the sofa, which, like much German furniture, was in a somewhat rickety condition. It also chanced that beneath this end of the sofa there stood a tank full of water in which the physiologist was conducting certain experiments upon the ova of fish, and which he kept in his drawing-room in order to insure an equable temperature. The additional weight of the maiden combined with the impetus with which she hurled herself upon him, caused the precarious piece of furniture to give way, and the body of the unfortunate student was hurled backwards into the tank, in which his head and shoulders were firmly wedged while his lower extremities flapped helplessly about in the air. This was the last straw. Extricating himself with

some difficulty from his unpleasant position, Von Hartmann gave an inarticulate yell of fury, and dashing out of the room, in spite of the entreaties of Elise, he seized his hat and rushed off into the town, all dripping and dishevelled, with the intention of seeking in some inn the food and comfort which he could not find at home.

As the spirit of Von Baumgarten encased in the body of Von Hartmann strode down the winding pathway which led down to the little town, brooding angrily over his many wrongs, he became aware that an elderly man was approaching him who appeared to be in an advanced state of intoxication. Von Hartmann waited by the side of the road and watched this individual, who came stumbling along, reeling from one side of the road to the other, and singing a student song in a very husky and drunken voice. At first his interest was merely excited by the fact of seeing a man of so venerable an appearance in such a disgraceful condition, but as he approached nearer, he became convinced that he knew the other well, though he could not recall when or where he had met him. This impression became so strong with him, that when the stranger came abreast of him he stepped in front of him and took a good look at his features.

'Well, sonny,' said the drunken man, surveying Von Hartmann and swaying about in front of him, 'where the Henker have I seen you before? I know you as well as I know myself. Who the deuce are you?'

'I am Professor von Baumgarten,' said the student. 'May I ask who you are? I am strangely familiar with your features.'

'You should never tell lies, young man,' said the other. 'You're certainly not the Professor, for he is an ugly snuffy old chap, and you are a big broad-shouldered young fellow. As to myself, I am Fritz von Hartmann at your service.'

'That you certainly are not,' exclaimed the body of Von Hartmann. 'You might very well be his father. But hullo, sir, are you aware that you are wearing my studs and my watch-chain?'

'Donnerwetter!' hiccupped the other. 'If those are not the trousers for which my tailor is about to sue me, may I never taste beer again.'

Now as Von Hartmann, overwhelmed by the many strange things which had occurred to him that day, passed his hand over his forehead and cast his eyes downwards, he chanced to catch the reflection of his own face in a pool which the rain had left upon the road. To his utter astonishment he perceived that his face was that of a youth, that his dress was that of a fashionable young student, and that in every way he was the antithesis of the grave and scholarly figure in which his mind was wont to dwell. In an

instant his active brain ran over the series of events which had occurred and sprang to the conclusion. He fairly reeled under the blow.

‘Himmel!’ he cried, ‘I see it all. Our souls are in the wrong bodies. I am you and you are I. My theory is proved—but at what an expense! Is the most scholarly mind in Europe to go about with this frivolous exterior? Oh the labours of a lifetime are ruined!’ and he smote his breast in his despair.

‘I say,’ remarked the real Von Hartmann from the body of the Professor, ‘I quite see the force of your remarks, but don’t go knocking my body about like that. You received it in excellent condition, but I perceive that you have wet it and bruised it, and spilled snuff over my ruffled shirt-front.’

‘It matters little,’ the other said moodily. ‘Such as we are so must we stay. My theory is triumphantly proved, but the cost is terrible.’

‘If I thought so,’ said the spirit of the student, ‘it would be hard indeed. What could I do with these stiff old limbs, and how could I woo Elise and persuade her that I was not her father? No, thank heaven, in spite of the beer which has upset me more than ever it could upset my real self, I can see a way out of it.’

‘How?’ gasped the Professor.

‘Why, by repeating the experiment. Liberate our souls once more, and the chances are that they will find their way back into their respective bodies.’

No drowning man could clutch more eagerly at a straw than did Von Baumgarten’s spirit at this suggestion. In feverish haste he dragged his own frame to the side of the road and threw it into a mesmeric trance; he then extracted the crystal ball from the pocket, and managed to bring himself into the same condition.

Some students and peasants who chanced to pass during the next hour were much astonished to see the worthy Professor of Physiology and his favourite student, both sitting upon a very muddy bank and both completely insensible. Before the hour was up quite a crowd had assembled, and they were discussing the advisability of sending for an ambulance to convey the pair to hospital, when the learned *savant* opened his eyes and gazed vacantly around him. For an instant he seemed to forget how he had come there, but next moment he astonished his audience by waving his skinny arms above his head and crying out in a voice of rapture, ‘Gott sei gedankt! I am myself again. I feel I am!’ nor was the amazement lessened when the student springing to his feet burst into the same cry, and the two performed a sort of ‘*pas de joie*’ in the middle of the road.

For some time after that people had some suspicion of the sanity of both the actors in this strange episode. When the Professor published his experiences in the 'Medicalschrift' as he had promised, he was met by an intimation, even from his colleagues, that he would do well to have his mind cared for, and that another such publication would certainly consign him to a madhouse. The student also found by experience that it was wisest to be silent about the matter.

When the worthy lecturer returned home that night he did not receive the cordial welcome which he might have looked for after his strange adventures. On the contrary, he was roundly upbraided by both his female relatives for smelling of drink and tobacco, and also for being absent while a young scapegrace invaded the house and insulted its occupants. It was long before the domestic atmosphere of the lecturer's house resumed its normal quiet, and longer still before the genial face of Von Hartmann was seen beneath its roof. Perseverance, however, conquers every obstacle, and the student eventually succeeded in pacifying the enraged ladies and in establishing himself upon the old footing. He has now no longer any cause to fear the enmity of Madame, for he is Hauptmann von Hartmann of the Emperor's own Uhlans, and his loving wife Elise has already presented him with two little Uhlans as a visible sign and token of her affection.

A. CONAN DOYLE.